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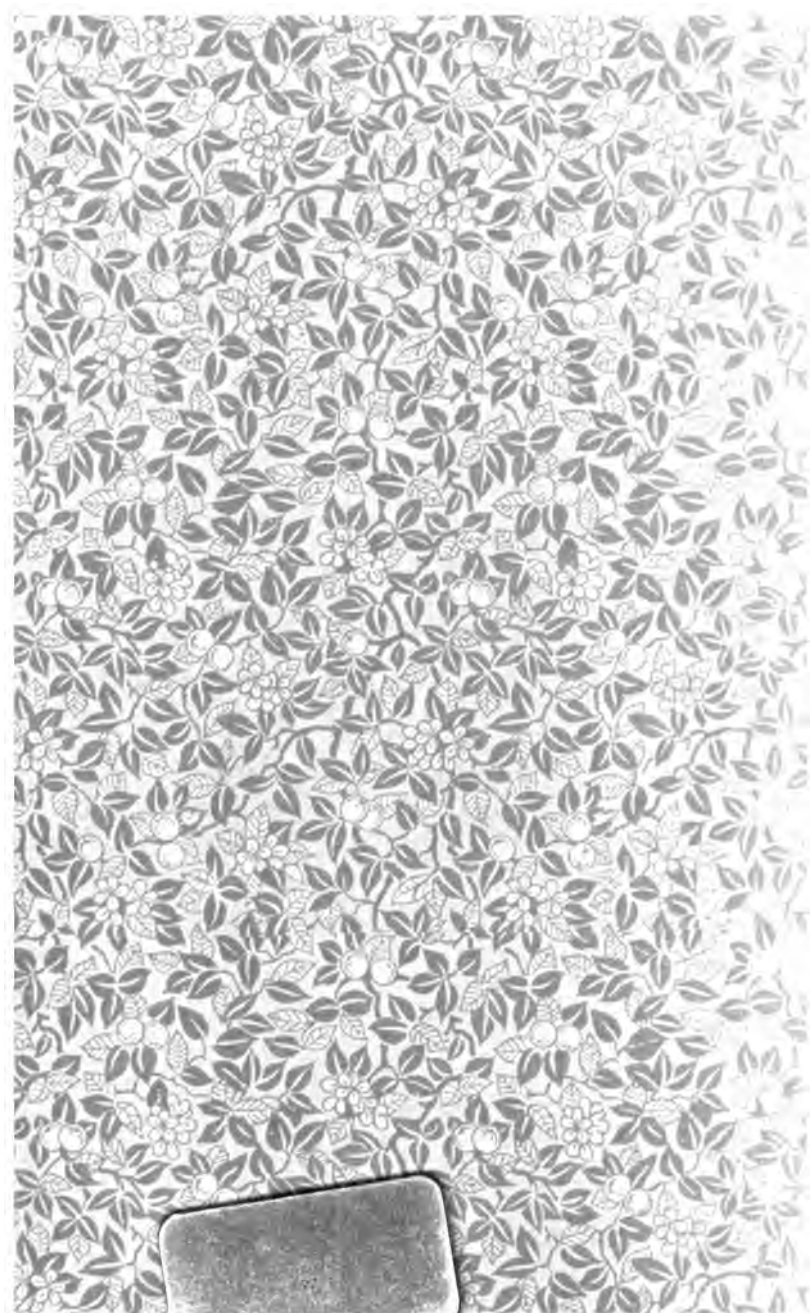
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ALASNAM'S LADY

LESLIE KEITH











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ALASNAM'S LADY.

A MODERN ROMANCE.

BY

LESLIE KEITH,

AUTHOR OF "SURRENDER," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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ALASNAM'S LADY.



CHAPTER I.

“Is this your comfort?

The cordial that ye bring a wretched lady?”

THE luncheon party was not a success. There was a gloom over everybody which all Mr. Ouvry's blandness could not dissipate. The tempting little dishes and the excellent wine failed of their usual effect; they did nothing to thaw the general frostiness which seemed to hold the party in a spell.

Philippa, it need hardly be said, was not present. Mrs. Henshaw came, but she did not prove the support that had been promised; she looked, on the contrary, as if she herself needed bracing. She still wore the limp gown, and her face expressed all too plainly that the day for disguises was gone. It was no longer pos-

sible, even if she had desired it, to hide her despair.

Mr. Ouvry looked at her once or twice, and wondered how so fine a woman could so abandon all her graces and charms. "She ought to have managed better," he said to himself softly. "This sort of betrayal does no good; it only makes a man more conscious that he must be master. A charming young lady like Miss Philippa ought to have known better than to make things uncomfortable all round. My Deonys, now, would never have given me pain."

He tried to catch a glimpse of his daughter as the thought of her arose in his mind. There was a large, full-leaved myrtle in a fancy pot between them, and he could not see her face. If he could have looked at her he would have seen that she was very grave, with a little flushed colour that came and went in her cheeks, and an almost proud curve of the lips that were usually so tender. She felt that there was something treacherous to her friend in this pretence of festivity, and, besides, in the bedroom—while she had put those little finishing touches to her costume, which even its plainness and her melancholy permitted—Mrs. Henshaw had made some remarks that rankled.

A vague, mysterious, general plaint—ad-

dressed as much to the looking-glass as to you—is hardly to be answered, especially when the speaker is your guest; but Deonys felt that this emphatic lingering on one theme, this perpetual hint that there was a duty she was bound to perform, meant something more than appeared. What duty did she owe to Philippa beyond that quick impulse to help and shield her, which love had already prompted? And how could she—so young and not wise, as her father had told her—be her deliverer? Then there was this other hint about money and about rights that were denied. What had she to do with this? She could have smiled at it all, except that it vexed her and haunted her memory persistently.

Mr. Ouvry, of course, knew nothing of these causes for her silence—which did not displease him. She had taken pains to set the table out daintily, and had been careful to select the little dishes that he preferred, and that was all you could expect of a little girl who was only eighteen, and who had not seen the world. One did not want her to be bold, and her timidity sat very well on her. He glanced about him well content. It was the room and the table of a gentleman who was not rich, not vulgarly rich, but who loved refinement, and knew what was in good taste.

He turned to his guest, who was eating with that impassive deliberateness with which he seemed to do everything.

"And you have seen all the sights, I suppose?" he said, picking up the talk where it had been left off. "You travellers to whom everything is new, are to be envied."

"I did not come here to see sights," said Mr. Ferryman, glancing up with a shadowed brow from his plate.

"Ah! there is not much to see that would interest you, I dare say," said Mr. Ouvry carelessly. "No mills, nothing of that kind. There's the tobacco factory; it is very flourishing, I believe, and employs a great many 'hands'—that is what you call them, isn't it? I could get you an order for that, if you care about it."

"Thanks, but I don't care about it—at least, not till I've done the business I came here to do. I'll think of looking round me after that. Business first, pleasure after, that's always been my motto."

Mrs. Henshaw hurriedly poured some water into her glass and held it to her lips.

"Ah, you should play a little," said Mr. Ouvry blandly, ignoring the nature of the business that brought this commercial person to Madrid. "A little relaxation is good for

everybody. But I dare say work grows very absorbing. I'm an idler myself, but I have noticed it in others."

"If you want to be rich you must work," said Mr. Ferryman, with frankly expressed contempt for this dilettante gentleman.

"Rich, yes; we have fallen out of the race here. I am afraid we are too indolent."

"Not much money going? I should say not, so far as I have seen. A poor, beggarly lot, the Spaniards."

"Not so poor—not so very poor as you might think," said Mr. Ouvry mildly. "We understand comfort here, though we don't perhaps make any great display—don't we, now?" He addressed himself to Mrs. Henshaw, turning to her and smiling and speaking gracefully.

"Comfort? Oh yes, we were very comfortable a little while ago," she said absently.

"Well, I like something to show for my money. Money means power. What's the good of it if you lock it up and never use it? You should see how we manage in Manchester and Liverpool; that would surprise you."

"There has been a great increase of luxury, I understand. It's a long time since I was in England, a very long time, and there have been many changes, no doubt."

"Luxury? Well, yes, rather. Not that I

go in for scattering right and left ; but I don't mind parting freely when I've set my heart on anything. You can get anything, if you give a long enough price for it."

"Di, help Mrs. Henshaw to the wine that is next you, my child. You must taste our Jerez"—he turned to his guest—"though you will hardly recognize it under its English name."

"I don't care for your wines here ; too light for me. I have a goodish cellar at home, though I say it. You have your money's worth in wine ; no loss there. There's some claret"—he went on to describe its virtues—"and some thirty-four port. I got it in an odd way, now ; but if you've money, as I said before, you can buy anything."

"Ah, you have great advantages, you happy owners of a Fortunatus' purse," said Mr. Ouvry gaily. "We have to be content with little things—little things. Yet we have our trifling comforts, too. Here is Mrs. Henshaw who will speak a good word for us, though she knows your English ways."

In spite of all his gaiety he was growing inwardly irritated and angry. He was tired of all this boasting about the money which he despised ; and he thought Mrs. Henshaw selfish, very selfish. Was he not doing his utmost to

support her cause—enduring this person who was offensive to him, for her sake—and yet she made no attempt to second his efforts. She sat as if dumb despair had overwhelmed her. She, too, had talked to him about money—this subject that seemed to be uppermost in every one's thoughts. It was in the air like an epidemic; even Di had hinted at it. It had been a painful interview, and he had been obliged to say things that he exceedingly disliked to say—to touch on subjects he would rather not have referred to. It was sad to him to refuse anything an old friend asked of him, but he was poor. What could he do? He spread out his white hands and shook his head at the mere thought. He had always openly proclaimed that he was poor. Then, by way of amendment, he had proposed this little lunch, to show that he bore her no ill will, that she had his countenance and sympathy, his help so far as he could give it. He had put himself out of the way to be kind to a man with whom he had nothing in common; he had done his best to help her cause, and she would do nothing to make things pleasant. It was very selfish.

“Papa,” said Di, in one of the pauses that now occurred with greater frequency, “if you don't mind—Mrs. Henshaw is tired——”

"Yes, yes; leave us, my child. Take Mrs. Henshaw to your own little room, and persuade her to rest on the sofa. You will join us afterwards?" he said pleasantly to the poor lady, who showed the greatest eagerness to accept this offer. "And Di will give us some coffee by-and-by."

They had risen, and he was holding open the door for them, when they all paused, arrested by a sudden sound. The man lingering at the table had risen, and was holding his glass. He put it down with a quick deepening of colour, and an expression that need not be recorded.

Di looked round startled.

It was the sound of some one playing in the room beneath them. The notes of a rather joyous air came up to them quite distinctly, played, one would say, with a hint of defiance—of disdain. All these things seemed to be in the music, and something more; a mischievous, smiling indifference that expressed itself, one could hardly tell how—perhaps in the touch, light and skilled and carelessly precise.

Di had never seen Philippa at the piano, but she knew that it was Philippa who was the musician. She did not need to be enlightened by Mr. Ferryman, who said, with his usual cold distinctness of utterance, but with something

rather more than his usual scowl, as he drew his whiskers together in one hand—

“Miss Henshaw has recovered, apparently.”

“Ah, what a pity we couldn't persuade her to join us,” said Mr. Ouvry, holding the door open for the ladies to pass out.

In the little odd-shaped room behind the tapestry hanging, Mrs. Henshaw turned upon the young girl.

“You see what she does!” she cried. “Listen! do you hear her? She will madden him with her folly. All the week she has remained in her own room, and refused to see any one—even me—even her own mother; and now, the moment our backs are turned, see how she behaves!”

The sprightly music reached them more faintly in the little shut-off room. Di listened perplexed, and yet she felt an unaccountable inclination to laugh. Philippa could never have reached this pitch of audacious gaiety unless she had discovered some wonderful path out of this labyrinth of trouble. If only the last few weeks could be wiped out, put away; if only this man would go, they might fall back into the old ways and be happy again. Hope sprang up; nothing but Mrs. Henshaw's tragic face kept her from smiling. She could not know that the old days would never return perfect as

they went, because though love might linger, undoubting trust was gone.

She turned a bright face to the poor lady.

"Something must have happened," she said; "it is Philippa's way of telling us that she has good news for us."

"Good news!" cried Mrs. Henshaw eagerly, laying her hand on the girl's wrist. "Do you think she has given in—did you persuade her, after all? Why didn't you tell me before?" she demanded.

"Tell you?" said Di, moving back a step. "Oh, you would never call it good news that she should marry that man?" she cried, light dawning on her.

"It is the only way," said Mrs. Henshaw gloomily. "I told you so before. You are very dull, I think."

"I am not clever," said Di gravely and simply—"not clever like Philippa; but one doesn't need to know very much to see that he couldn't make her happy. You heard how he talked—all about his money. He would buy Philippa like his wine, or his horses, or his house that he told us about. And he would know that she took him just for these things that he could give her, and not for himself at all. There would be no sacredness in a marriage like that."

Mrs. Henshaw stood, a tragic, half-scornful image of despair, in her straight gown and severe head-dress, while the young girl poured out her simple, old-world ideas of the love and trust that alone to her made oneness possible. She was sorry for the unhappy mother, and she felt that she had not spoken gently before. It seemed as if she only needed to speak gently to make it all plain and convincing.

Mrs. Henshaw heard her to the end; her dull, anxious eyes fixed on the earnest ones that seemed to plead for Philippa. Perhaps it was old thronging memories of days when she, too, had thought love was all that now lent her patience. In after days, she used to tell how Di had lectured her and say, with a shake of the head, she feared the girl was very forward. No doubt she took it from her mother, who had been bold enough, as every one knew. But at this time, in the little room which the distant strains of melody invaded, she could think of nothing outside her own needs.

Yet Di's very guilelessness made her answer a trifle less incisive than it might have been.

"You know nothing about it," she said coldly. "All that is very well, it is what one says when one is young. I want her to be happy, I am sure. She is all that I have. If it is his being in trade you object to, that only

shows how ignorant you are—when dukes and earls are not ashamed to be merchants. And as for literary men—I have heard of authors and people like that who kept market gardens and made carpets, and I'm sure brewers are received everywhere. If you have been prejudicing Philippa——”

“Oh, no,” said Di, opening her eyes; “why should I do that? He might be a butcher or a baker, and be a very good man, but he isn't good.”

“A baker! As if my child could marry a man who wore a white apron and sold loaves! It is such bad taste to talk like that. Not good? What can you know? He has excellent points, and I don't see why she shouldn't be happy; as much so as others are.”

“Never, with that man!” Di said impulsively; thinking only of Philippa. “She could never get to like him. It isn't that he is in business, or that he is plain-looking—that wouldn't matter, but his mind is ugly too.”

“You are most unjust, and really quite indelicate!” cried Mrs. Henshaw, taking refuge once more in her sense of outraged ladyhood. “When I was a girl I never presumed to have an opinion on such subjects. An ugly mind! No wonder Philippa is prejudiced and obstinate if that is how you talk to her. I might have

known that my poor child would suffer from your friendship."

"Oh, don't let Philippa marry him!" Di went forward and laid her little hand on that other hand from which all the bright rings had been stripped. "She must not do it. If he had any honour, if he were nice, he would go away when he sees that he is hateful to her; because he must see it."

"Go away! child, how dull you are. She has promised to marry him, she can't get free. Do you think he is a man who is likely to give up his claim for a mere whim on her part?"

"I know," Di said gravely, "he bought her promise. But if he were paid back——"

"Was that what you meant by good news?" Mrs. Henshaw caught at this suggestion. "Was that what you thought when you said that Philippa was trying to tell us something pleasant—that she has found a way to pay back the money?"

Di shrank from the hungry anxiety of the poor lady's eyes; all the frail defences of her pride were swept away as she reached out to grasp at this possible deliverance. "I want her to be happy," she cried. "Do you think I like him so much after the way he has treated me this week. Oh, what I have suffered! And

now you think she has discovered a way to pay him?"

"How can I know?—oh, I am sorry to disappoint you," she answered sadly. "I thought it might be that, but how can I be sure?"

The music died out, and with it her hope seemed suddenly quenched too.

"You are a false comforter," said Mrs. Henshaw bitterly, pushing away the entreating hand. "You talk and you do nothing, you and your father. It is he, your father, who ought to have helped us; it is only just that he should do it, but he refuses, and now my poor Philippa must be sacrificed!"

All at once, in face of this new disappointment, the sacrifice of Philippa took large proportions; there was no longer any talk of her being happy as others were. She was now to be miserable, and all because justice had been denied her.

Di summoned patience to her aid, and made one more effort to save her friend.

"Even if he isn't paid just now he must go away," she said resolutely. "She ought never to have promised, but it is better to break her word than to be false all her life. There would be less truth in keeping such a promise than in breaking it."

Mrs. Henshaw sank down on a low seat, and covered her eyes. She gave herself up to dark

reflections. There was in all this wearisome talk of truth and falsehood nothing that was of the least practical use ; you might as well expect to convert Mr. Ferryman to your views by reading aloud a moral "middle" from the *Saturday Review*.

"Think if there should be some one who was good and true, and whom Philippa liked," said Di timidly, after a pause, "and it was too late."

Mrs. Henshaw removed her handkerchief, and looked up dully. She heard nothing but one word ; but in it there was a vague possibility of comfort.

"Some one else ?" she repeated.

"I don't know," Di said hurriedly. "One does not talk of these things, but it might very easily be. Philippa is so beautiful, and think if you made her marry this man, and all the time there was somebody else !"

"Do you think every woman marries the man she loves !" cried the older lady with disdain. "Do you think *any* woman does ?"

"Yes, I do." Di's colour came and went, but her eyes were brave and direct in their glance. "And Philippa must be one of them."

Mrs. Henshaw sat up and stared at her. Her handkerchief dropped from her hands. Slowly in her dull, anxious eyes, there grew a little spark of something that might be resolution, or

desire, or hope. Deonys watched the dawning of her thought with fascination, but when it clothed itself in words, she hated it.

"You mean Felix Chester," said the lady slowly.

"I named no one!" cried the girl unwillingly. "He never told me, and Philippa never spoke. I only said there might be some one else," said poor Di, blushing and ashamed, and filled with a sudden hatred of the whole subject.

Mrs. Henshaw was not listening.

"He would lend it; he is rich," she murmured to herself. "It is nothing to him."

She had risen and was pacing the room. Her limp draperies seemed to recover some of the old sweep and rustle as she walked. She put up her hands, and pushed back the cap from her brow, instinctively her back straightened, and her head was raised, as this little germ of thought expanded and began to take definite shape—to put out small leaves and blossoms of hope.

"He is quite as rich," she continued in an undertone, "and in a much better position. I was a fool not to think of this way before—my sufferings have made me dull. It is easy to see he loves my girl; I was so sure of it before, but I have forgotten everything. My poor Philippa! He would do much to win her."

Deonys turned away from these fragments of her mental workings, and went out on the balcony.

She leaned over it and looked broodingly on the crowd beneath. The familiar sounds came up, but they did not consciously reach her. The great square was full of life and bustle at this its busiest hour ; clerks and milliners, and the tide of shop boys and girls were leisurely returning from dinner, a little knot of men transacted business, relieved by much gesticulation, on the pavement of the Montera ; veiled ladies flitted back from mass ; above all the noise of wheels and the hum of voices came the harsh screech of a parrot crawling over its gilded cage in a neighbouring balcony.

She was thinking with hot shame of her sudden impulse. What had she done ? Felix Chester's bright face rose before her—was it love that made it so sunny, she wondered wistfully, and was it he whom Philippa would choose before all others ? Or had she made a dreadful blunder, and only brought more trouble on everybody ? For a moment she wished these people had never come to disturb the harmony of her life with their mysteries—then she remembered her vow of friendship, and her heart melted. There was a momentary hush of the crowd below, and it appealed to her as the

ordinary sounds had not done. She leaned forward a little and looked downward. A priest was passing with the Host, and the people knelt as the tinkle of the bell was heard. Some one was in a last extremity—was dying. It was no new sight to Deonys, but she thought of it with a little pang. Love troubles all at once looked paltry and insignificant. "I suppose it won't matter so very much when it come to that," she said to herself, and turned to rejoin her guest.

Mrs. Henshaw had not missed her. She was standing before a narrow mirror in a dim frame hung high on the wall. She had taken off her cap and tossed it aside; the bands of her hair already took a less severe curve. There were other signs of renewed hope about her.

"Ah, my dear," she said, with a smile, "if my beloved girl is happy and honoured, it will be you who have done it. It was only right, if you knew everything; but you did not know, and I am not ungrateful. It will be hard to do, but I have done hard things before. We must think a little of you, too, eh? and of some one we won't name."

Di's cheeks flamed; but what she might have replied remains uncertain, for the door opened, and Mr. Ouvry appeared. Behind him came Mr. Ferryman, looking about him as if he were


pricing the furniture and repeating that remark about Spanish insolvency and the power of money to buy anything you desire to possess. His glance included them all. There was an easy air of mastery about him, especially when his eyes rested on Mrs. Henshaw. He drew together his whiskers, and surveyed her calmly. He noticed the little change in her manner, the fluttering attempt at rebellion; but it did not disturb him. He meant to have his own way, even if he had to pay heavily for it.

"Mr. Ferryman has been examining our little collection, Di," said Mr. Ouvry, standing with his back to the fireplace, and smiling graciously on his guests. "I'm afraid he doesn't set such a high value on our treasures as we do."

"I don't know about that," said the person referred to; "you can pick them up cheap, I suppose. I don't go in for collecting myself. I put my house into the hands of Green and Barnes, the art decorators; that's the thing to do, you know, if you want everything correct."

"Ah, no doubt."

"I gave them a general order," he continued, lifting a book from the table, and handling it as if it were a ledger. "I said to them, 'None of your tertiary colours for me; I won't have your spinach and pea-soup on my walls. You go to the Zoo and look at a parrot—there's



good harmony for you, and a bit of colour. I'll have something to show for my money.' I rather think I hit it there. It has been the making of Green and Barnes. They send people to look at the house, you know."

"Ah, no doubt," Mr. Ouvry repeated. "Very charming for you, and a great saving of trouble, that way of doing things; but a little loss of individuality, eh?"

"Oh, I don't care about that; saves a lot of bother, as you say. Comes dearer, perhaps; but we don't mind about that over there. Come and take a look at it next time you are north."

"Thank you," said Mr. Ouvry, with apparent gratitude, "thank you very much; but I never go north. I am no traveller. I shrink from revisiting my country. Sad memories," he sighed; then he smiled, as if unwilling to obtrude his griefs on others. "I hear of it from my friends," he said, turning to Mrs. Henshaw; "I count on them for news."

"I must go down to my poor Philippa," she answered, rising hurriedly, perhaps afraid of a too pointed invitation to inspect the work of Messrs. Green and Barnes. "My poor child has been alone all day."

"Won't you stay and have some coffee? Our Concha is famed for her coffee."

"No, I must go."

"One may hope to see Miss Henshaw this evening, since she has recovered?"

The words hardly veiled the intended sneer. There was room enough, but Mr. Ferryman seemed to block the path to the door, and make it impossible for her to ignore his question. There was, to her secret thought, an imperious command in his voice.

"Yes, my daughter will see you." She shrank at first; but she quickly summoned courage, and recovered a remnant of her old dignity. "I think we must have one of our pleasant little gatherings." She turned to the girl behind her. "Di, my dear, couldn't you join us this evening?"

"No," said Deonys with decision; "I couldn't do that."

She went, without further attempt at persuasion, and Mr. Ferryman soon after took his leave.

"Deonys, my child," said her father, coming back from escorting his guest to the door, "don't deny yourself any little pleasure for me. Is it dinner you were thinking of? I have dined. A cup of tea by-and-by. Concha will attend to me."

"Oh, padre!" cried Di reproachfully, "do you think I want any more of *that* man! If you really don't care to dine, we can have a

nice, cosy little supper together to take the bad taste away. Don't you feel as if you had been lunching on bank-notes?"

"Ah, our friend is a little too pronounced, eh? Like his house. You don't think Miss Philippa will be tempted by all these fine things?"

"I like something to show for my money," said Di with saucy mimicry; "but there are some things even he can't buy, padre. Were things as you liked them?" she asked, after a pause. "Did I do right?"

"Yes, yes, you did very well. Everything was as I wished."

"Then it is over," she answered, with a great sigh of satisfaction; "and we needn't have him again."

"Well, we have done the right thing—been hospitable and taken an interest. Mrs. Henshaw is an old friend, and I wished to please her; but you ladies are capricious. One might almost imagine she had changed her mind." He spoke with mild patience. "Ah, you ladies, there is no understanding you."

Di did not accept the gauntlet thrown at her feet. She was wondering if she had done "the right thing." She could not tell, and she tried to put the thought away from her. She was tired of this frequent appeal to her strongest


emotions, and the luncheon party was over, and her father had been pleased !

She did not know of the little note that was at that moment speeding across the square, and that was presently to fall into Felix Chester's hands.

CHAPTER XIV.


“Rumour! that ugly jade!”

FELIX CHESTER had not been idle during his enforced absence from the gilded salon in the Preciados. He had been thinking. “How old Ralph would scoff at the word!” he said to himself, with a grin. He had been recalling ended school days and college days less remote. Old friends were passed in review before him—kindred spirits, to whom he had sworn a loyal devotion—acquaintances who had been more quickly forgotten. He had been popular with all sorts of men, even the reading men, who “went in” for continual and systematic work, while he (Felix), had modestly contented himself with a study of the various ways in which time might be wasted. It was with one of these, his old comrades, that his thinking had specially to do at this time. He put away from him, with a sigh, many a brilliant and fascinating



memory, and he tasked himself with recalling all he could about a certain Alfred Smith.

His thoughts had not lingered much about Smith since they parted; but surely he had heard something about him lately. He had cultivated system, read hard, starved himself a little, drank nothing but mild, effervescing stuffs, and was never seen on the river. In fact, he was in all respects the opposite of Felix, who had a robust enjoyment in the good things of life. These particulars came back readily enough, and presently other facts were recalled. After taking his degree, he had entered holy orders, and was presented to a small living in the north—in Lancashire, wasn't it—in Manchester or in Liverpool? A sudden happy thought visited him. He sprang up, seized his desk, and turned out the contents. Yes, here was Cuthbertson's letter, not destroyed, as he had feared; and here was everything about Smith—his difficulties with his bishop, his ritualistic tendencies, and so on. Felix tossed back all the papers, and, searching for a clean sheet, sat down to write. He expressed a great desire to take up the dropped thread of his acquaintance with Smith. He had always liked the old fellow, though he had laughed at him a little. He asked him a great many questions; he scribbled off a handsome cheque, with the



modest hope that he might find it useful in the decoration or the restoration of his church. He was sure to go in for that sort of thing, old Smith. What would the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings think of their new disciple?—Felix wondered, with inward amusement. He had listened to many subtle and profound arguments at their meetings in London, and here he was going dead against the doctrine of the “anti-scrapers” on the first opportunity! Well, it was all for a good cause; it was a case in which one might be pardoned the doing of a little evil for the sake of securing a great good.

When he had signed his name, and sealed and addressed his letter, he lay back in his chair, and gave himself up to laughter. There was something very amusing indeed about this correspondence with an old friend. Mr. Ferryman, who occupied the adjoining room, scowled as that gay burst of merriment reached him. The two men had not again met since that day on the Recoletos, but their mutual dislike had grown in the interval. Felix had not found his way again to the Preciados. When he would have gone, something held him back, and that note which Mrs. Henshaw had written had not yet reached him.

The lady herself was far from happy, in spite

of the momentary gleam of cheerfulness that had visited her in the tapestried room. She was weak, but she was not wholly bad, and the struggle between her better and her baser nature rent her sorely. Never till a week or two ago had she known the bitterness of humiliation;—she who had been always so ostentatious, so confident, so unvaryingly right. To escape from this hard bondage at any cost had been her one endeavour. She could no longer endure it. She must be set free, even if her deliverance were purchased at the price of Philippa's happiness. Then there had come that hint of a rescuer, who should relieve her of this burdening sense of shame, and make Philippa happy at the same time. She had grasped at it eagerly at the moment; but now that she looked at it a little closely, it seemed that even here there was room for much despondency. Felix had showed some eagerness to come to Madrid with them; he had been charming and attentive and pleasant; but, then, he had been all these things for the last year or two; he was all these things to the very newest of his acquaintances; and he showed no signs of taking the needful step over the boundary that divides friendliness from love.

“You do nothing to help me,” she said to

her daughter, irritated and despairing. "You do everything to hinder me."

It was evening; the lights were low, the drawing-room dull, and both ladies, it must be told, a little tired of each other.

"I have let things take their course," Philippa answered. She was lying back in a large chair; she was pale, and this lounging attitude was new to her. "What else was there to do?" she went on presently. "It seems to me we are drifting on very surely to the end you desire. Oh, I am so tired of it all!"

There was something hopeless in the tone, that touched the latent mother-love in Mrs. Henshaw's heart.

"I want you to be happy," she said wistfully. "Why should I desire to see my only child miserable? If you would only help me——"

"But I can't be happy to order, unfortunately," Philippa smiled. "Don't speak of happiness and that man in the same breath; there's a whole world between them."

"I did not marry for love," said Mrs. Henshaw, pursuing her own train of thought; "and yet I believe I did my duty as a wife."

"Ah, if he had been like my father! but it is desecration to compare them."

"Perhaps that child was not so far wrong,

after all," said Mrs. Henshaw musingly; and then she sighed. "The world would call it utter folly, but if I had had my own way—if he hadn't been entrapped by that scheming creature I might have been much happier and better, and poor papa might have married some clever, sensible, elderly person, though you wouldn't have had my beauty. I shouldn't have lost all my good looks and turned grey with worrying myself to death about you, for he is rich and your poor papa was ruined. I'm sure I don't know what he does with all his money, unless he is hoarding it for that girl."

Philippa stared; this inconsequent speech, with its odd mixture of feeling and folly, was more surprising to her than most of her mother's speeches; it hinted at a past of which she knew and wished to know nothing.

"If you had married some one else," she said with a gleam of fun in her eyes, "you wouldn't have had much to do with me, I suppose; and if I had taken after my plain, elderly mamma, Mr. Ferryman wouldn't——"

"Do be quiet, Philippa, you confuse me with your arguments. You should never argue, it is unladylike. And what is the use of supposing so many things when you can't change anything."

"Oh," said Philippa with a little sigh, "it's

such a comfort to get away from the hard truth sometimes. I wish I could suppose myself into the ugliest girl I ever saw—that Miss Reed, for instance, with the red hair. Do you remember her ? ”

“ What nonsense you talk ! I have no patience with you. You ought to be thankful you are not like that unfortunate girl, who was really the plainest—and so conceited, too ; you always notice that plain people are vain. You know very well that, without a fortune, your appearance is your only recommendation.”

“ I know,” said Philippa gravely. “ Oh, mamma, why were you so pretty ? or why wasn't I like poor, plain papa ? ”

She went over to her mother and with a rare gesture of tenderness bent and stroked her cheek. “ But I must say you have done the best you could to eclipse your charms the last few days. Did Blake invent this hideous cap ? ”

“ How could I think of my dress,” said Mrs. Henshaw reproachfully, “ when I was so miserable ! ”

“ It was paying him far too great a compliment,” said the girl proudly.

“ Well, I'll put on my black satin to-morrow, and the cap you made for me, child. I am not quite faded yet, and I needn't make myself a fright ; but I never could bear the triviality some

people show in their dress, never making any difference however they may feel; it shows such a light mind. I wore crape for years for your poor papa, though I was so young. Perhaps it is well, though, to let him see that we are not quite so helpless as he supposes."

"Mamma," said Philippa, to whom these sentiments conveyed some subtle meaning not openly expressed, "have you thought of any new plan?" She clasped the back of the chair, and leaning over it spoke in a low voice.

Mrs. Henshaw made no immediate answer, and Philippa went on more vehemently—

"Because I can't take the one *he* wants, and sell myself to him. Nothing will make me change my mind, even if I have to beg in the streets for bread."

"Ah! what do you know of poverty?"

"A little, I think. At least, it would be better than wealth with him."

"I have told you I want you to be happy!" she said plaintively.

"And I won't risk my chance of happiness by giving it into his hands," Philippa answered gravely. "If I must marry I might surely find a lighter yoke."

"I have thought of another way."

Mrs. Henshaw's voice was rather faint; she clasped her hands together to hide their nervous

trembling. She was thankful that her face could not be seen by the girl standing behind her.


"Then don't tell me what it is," said Philippa quickly. "I don't want to know. Don't tell me anything about it; not even a hint. Oh, I am so tired of it all!" she said with sudden vehemence. "I want to forget it."

"You don't think of me, or of what I have suffered."

"If it comes to suffering——" Philippa began gloomily, then she checked herself. "I do think of you, poor mamma; but my marriage would not have helped you, and any other way will be better—it cannot, at least, be worse."

"It will be very difficult. But I can bear it alone. I am not selfish, I hope. I can suffer for those I love."

She spoke with melancholy intonation, but she was secretly relieved that Philippa showed no curiosity to learn the particulars of this new plan. She was a little afraid of Philippa. Generally the girl acquiesced in the arrangements supposed to be made for her good, contenting herself with a half sarcastic comment or two; but now and then she startled her mother by an outleap of indignant scorn, or a bitter protest, the more unexpected because of her general light gaiety. Who could tell how



she would accept this—the last hope of freedom from a bondage that was growing unendurable? There was just enough of uncertainty about her manner of viewing the proposal to make it well she should remain ignorant. And there was besides, in the lady's mind a great shrinking from clothing her vague resolution in definite words. It would be so hard to draw back, and she felt she must leave herself a loophole of escape. For, after all, to ask Felix Chester for a large sum of money would be only a less bitter wound to her pride than to accept it from Mr. Ferryman on his own terms. She knew it now; it would not be the entire deliverance she had dreamed of; it would be but a shifting of her shame.

"I am doing it for you. I am doing a very hard thing for you, Philippa, that you may have the chances I have missed," she said, as she thought of all these difficulties that strewed her path.

"I know mamma." Philippa stooped and kissed her brow. "There, don't let us talk of it any more, I am so tired of it all. I am going to bed; I'm an invalid yet, you know." She turned at the door to look back with a smile. "Don't sit up and worry, that will do no good."

"That is easily said," Mrs. Henshaw answered,

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"That is easily said," Mrs. Henshaw answered,

"She shall never know from me," she said to herself. The words she would have spoken aloud were checked by a sudden summons at the door.

"Oh," cried Di with dismay, "there's a visitor, and I haven't even begun to tell you."

"It isn't Barbara—who can it be?"

It was Mrs. St. John, who came in with an air of cheerful importance, made her greetings, and restored, with one wave of her prettily gloved hand, the reign of the commonplace and the conventional.

"Here I am," she said, choosing a rocking-chair with her back to the light; "and, oh dear! how I do pity myself." She sighed and shook out all her flounces. "Mrs. Gordon, don't look so dreadfully hard-hearted. Think of my being torn from Paris, and whirled off here at a moment's notice. Now, really, isn't it rather brutal of Mr. St. John?"

"Very inconsiderate. I should have thought you had taught him better by this time."

"It's a beautiful thing, a well-managed husband!" sighed this aggrieved wife. "Mine won't let me spend more than half the year in Paris. He says I should grow too frivolous. Now I like frivolity; I've a genius for it. Isn't it a pity to curb me in the only thing I'm good at?"

"You can find opportunities to practise your

accomplishment even here," said Mrs. Gordon, indulgent to this little woman, who, by her own frank confession, belonged to the trifling world.

"Your husband's position as *attaché* opens the door of all the gaieties for you. Your pretty costumes won't be quite thrown away."

"But they'll be wasted. I might as well wear a sack and put ashes on my head. There's nobody fit to appreciate Worth's genius here. Laura Delmar is spending the winter in New York. Isn't it mean of her?"

"Then you will be mistress of ceremonies at the American Embassy."

"Oh, well, Colonel Delmar can't get on without me; but it's mean of Laura all the same."

"And you will have the chance of being kind to some new friends. Did you hear of the addition to our colony?"

"Major Gibbs isn't married!" cried the lady, with animation.

"No." Mrs. Gordon smiled. "The ladies I speak of are friends of Di's."

"Oh, then, I guess they won't be my kind," said Mrs. St. John, with naïve disappointment.

"But anyhow it's better than a Mrs. Gibbs. I don't care about having my gentlemen friends marry; and the major is a perfect slave to

trembling. She was thankful that her face could not be seen by the girl standing behind her.

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"That is easily said," Mrs. Henshaw answered,

I thought Englishmen were too cold-blooded for that sort of thing."

Di's heart beat afresh with fear. If they should fight--her mind refused to take in the thought of a duel with all its dreadful possibilities. She was depressed with a vague sense of danger and dismay and disgust, and hardly noticed when Mrs. St. John rose to leave. She did not listen to her parting salutation.

"Well, it's about time I was going, anyway. I've got some perfectly lovely things; come and see them, and tell me more about that girl. I'm dying to hear how it goes off."

She did not look round till Mrs. Gordon called to her softly.

"Oh, she is horrid!" she said, going forward to her friend, still indignant. "Why didn't she stay in Paris?"

"She would have stayed if she could." Mrs. Gordon looked amused.

"But she hasn't a 'well-managed husband!'" said Di with great disdain.

"You mustn't take her foolish talk so to heart. Your friend Philippa would tell you to laugh at it all. She wouldn't mind it."

"She would. You none of you understand Philippa, not even you, I think, who understand everybody." She sat down, and laid her head against the edge of the sofa. "If you can

be kind to that dreadful Mrs. St. John, why are you cruel to Philippa ? ”

“ Am I cruel to her ? I didn't know it. ”

“ You think she did this thing, but she didn't. She would never frighten poor Miss Piper so ; and let them fight a duel for her ! ”

“ No, I think she wouldn't. You must take the duel as a picturesque detail added by Mrs. St. John. ”

“ She is in trouble. I wish she would come and talk to you, for I can't tell you about it. ”

“ Not if she doesn't wish me to know. ”

“ Yes, ” said Di dubiously, “ I suppose I mustn't tell you. I don't think she would like it talked about. Oh, I think there is a great deal of trouble in the world. ”

“ Have you found that out already, my child ; and you are only—how old ? ”

“ Nearly nineteen. Does one need to be so very old to know that ? I dare say I knew it before ; but I never thought of these things till lately. ”

There are times when to say nothing is best. Mrs. Gordon was one of those rare women who hold that when you have not the right word to say it is better to say nothing. The beneficent love and tenderness that help us in our need, can they not reach us though the lips are closed ?

There was a stillness, more soothing than any speech, in the large, sunny room, hardly invaded now by any sound from the outer world. After a time, Mrs. Gordon raised herself painfully, and leaned a moment on her elbow. She sank back again among the pillows with a smile. And so, in a perfect and serene calm, the day went on; the sunlight died from off the wall, and the lights changed.

By-and-by there was another appeal at the door. This time it was Felix Chester who was the visitor. He brought some of the departed sunshine with him.

"I've come for the cup of tea Miss Barbara promised me," he said, going up to Mrs. Gordon, who was already counted among his old friends, though he had seen her but some half-dozen times in all.

She smiled an answer to the bright young face and the bright, fresh voice; but she held up a finger in warning.

"Softly!" she said. "She is tired."

Felix stepped with elaborate care round the sofa, and stood a moment looking down.

Deonys, wearied with her conflicting thoughts, had fallen asleep; her face was turned up to the light, "tired eyelids upon tired eyes." Felix's face did not lose its smile, but it took a graver, more absorbed expression. Something

made the young man suddenly think of the best poetry he knew, the poetry that expresses the fairest and purest emotions that life holds. Then he turned and went quickly to the further window.

CHAPTER III.

“And as for love ; God wot, I love not yet ;
But love I shall, God willing.”

A MOMENT later the girl stirred. Slowly she came back from the dream world where she had wandered, and consciousness dawned in her sweet eyes. She lifted her hand, and pushed back her hair.

“Have I been asleep ?” she said. “Oh, how dreadful of me ! And our talk——”

She paused, for her glance had strayed to the further window, where Felix stood, dark against the fading light. Her wavering colour rose as she recognized him ; a sudden timidity seized her.

“Have I missed the sunset ?” she asked ; and, without waiting for a reply, she rose and went across the room to a distant balcony that looked upon the plain.

The salon was very large. You had the sense of living in it almost as in the open air.

The north, the south, and the west looked in at the many casements; every subtle change of weather and all the sunshine of the year visited it.

The last of many houses in a straggling suburb, there was on this side nothing but a red-tiled roof or two between it and the long sweep of undulating land—the plain that might seemingly roll on for ever, but for the sharp arrest of the snow mountains thirty miles away. There was not a single sign of life about it, not a single figure to break its sad monotony, hardly a stunted tree relieved against the sky. To most people it might seem a stony desolation, dreary and pitiless in its barrenness; a bit of the happy earth given over to a slow death.

But Deonys knew better. She had seen its resurrection in the spring time. Even so early as February it would put on its youth and its greenness; even in its November sombreness of brown and grey and tarnished gold it had its own beauty for those who had eyes to see it. Where you have so wide and open a country you have a wide sky and infinite changes of silvery light, of cloud, and of shadow. Deonys had come too late for this burning glow of the sunset; but the after-tints lingered, the daffodil that succeeds the deep orange, the faint rose that follows the fire. In the blue-grey of the

early November twilight the colour quickly fades ; soon the plain grew shadowy ; the mountain-line against the sky, apt to be too sharply urgent at mid-day, lost its definiteness, and seemed with every moment to recede. There were stars coming out one by one slowly.

It was time, and more than time, to turn away, but Di lingered. It was very peaceful, and she loved it well. She knew that Felix Chester had come out, and was standing at her side. She did not want to turn round and to take up the burden of other people's vexations and troubles, or their joys, as it might be, just yet. This one little moment she wanted for herself.

Yet, when at last she looked at him, he was not silently laughing at her, as she feared. He was looking out at the gathering dusk, with a face as grave as her own.

"It is like the sea—like what I think the sea must be," she said, with sudden confidence, feeling that he understood.

"And that the other line of coast?" he said, pointing to the dim outline against the horizon. "I have seen it look just so in its calmest moods, when you can hardly hear the faint wash of water on the beach. And that might be an island I know well, far up in the north. The mountains rise with just the same sort of

abruptness from the shore; and in winter they are snow-capped, too."

"I am glad it is like. I have never seen the sea."

"Never?" he said surprised.

"Perhaps when I was a baby, but I don't remember. It is a long way to the baths, where the Spaniards go."

"But do you stay here all summer? Isn't it dreadfully hot?"

"Sometimes we go to Aranjuez, where there are trees. It isn't so very cool there, either; but papa likes it. I have been in the south, too; but not in Cadiz or Gibraltar."

"I have seen Cadiz. It is very white; and the sea very blue—not like our grey northern waters—and everywhere all over the little town you have the strong scent of the brine. You can't forget how near the Atlantic is."

"I should like to go. Isn't it odd that I should be English, and that I should never have looked at any bit of water bigger than a pond?"

"You will see the 'silver streak' we are so proud of, one day. I wish I might be there when you see it for the first time."

"Oh, I shouldn't talk much, I think," she said, looking at him rather archly. She had forgotten her shyness for the moment. "Why

do people always call out and exclaim about anything that is beautiful? It takes away all the sacredness of it."

"Yes," said Felix. "I hate a fellow who has always his whole stock of adjectives at hand to pour out on the first thing that turns up."

How Ralph would have laughed behind his beard if he could have heard this speech!

"And, besides, if it is like this, it will seem an old friend."

"Oh, but it isn't like this. This is only a little like it in one of its humours—its best and quietest humour; but it has as many whims and caprices as—as some beautiful ladies I know," he finished, with a laugh.

Di glanced at him wistfully. Was he thinking of Philippa? she wondered; and had anything happened to make him count her fickle? No, that could not be. His words reminded her of that burden of alien troubles she had forgotten for a little, and all the pleasantness of the moment vanished.

"It is time to go in," she said; and stepped back into the dazzle of lights.

Miss Barbara had returned, and there was a clinking of spoons, as she arranged the cups.

"How do you do, child?" she said abruptly,

presenting her cheek to be kissed. "You are alone? That's right."

"Did you expect the padre? But you wouldn't have said anything so very uncomplimentary if you did."

"Expect your father!" said Miss Barbara, with an air of wonderful contempt, as if that would be foolishness indeed. "I'm not one to mince my words, Di; and what I mean is this—you stick to your own people, the people that have known you all your days, since you were a helpless baby, and don't you be enticed away by strangers. My dear, old friends are best."

"I hope never to forget old friends," said the girl a little proudly.

She knew as well as if Miss Barbara had said it in so many words, that this was a warning against Philippa. This ugly gossip about her must have reached this distant quarter, too. She sat silent, with hot cheeks, afraid even to ask after Miss Piper, in case that innocent question might bring out another version of the report in Miss Barbara's unvarnished speech.

She need not have been afraid. Miss Barbara sat very erect, with ominous grimness, and lips tightly pursed against disclosure. There were some things girls ought not to know anything about, and she wasn't going to put nonsense


into Di's head. The child would be thinking it necessary to have a lover next.

Di did not know that Miss Barbara, who made it her duty once every week to visit, admonish, guide, and direct Miss Piper in the way she should go, had set out that day on purpose to reproach and overwhelm the little spinster with shame.

Confronted with the rumour, Miss Piper had confessed that it was true. Philip had come to her house twice, but only twice, to meet the Englishman, about whom everybody was talking.

Miss Barbara had declared witheringly that she despised underhand ways, and that, considering her years and her grey hairs, Miss Piper might have had more sense.

Then the little lady, stung by these reproaches, had burst out weeping. It was cruel to taunt her with her experience—she who had always desired to keep her youthful feelings, and who had counselled young people to think twice, and implored them to be in no haste to marry. And what could she do? Miss Henshaw was a beautiful young lady and in great distress, and who could refuse her? And she, Miss Piper, had been so alarmed and upset, and had lain awake ever since, dreading that Mr. Ferryman might come back alone and upbraid her for



advising Philippa not to bind herself. What should she have done, then—a lonely woman with an angry man in the house?

It was a confused story, told with an eager endeavour to shield Philippa, and yet showing clearly with what reluctance the little spinster had yielded, and how in her own weak way she had suffered.

Miss Barbara, relentless in her cross-examination, had learned but two facts—that Mrs. Henshaw did not know of these meetings, and that Miss Henshaw did not mean to marry this gentleman. To have secured a stolen interview with a favoured lover might possibly have been pardoned, though Miss Barbara clung to the decorous, ceremonious love-making of her youth; but to meet a man clandestinely—for some mysterious reason known to nobody—that was not to be forgiven her. Not all Philippa's pretty speeches could reinstate her in the lady's good graces. The memory of the night when she had met with that blank refusal at Mrs. Henshaw's door still rankled.

"When people make light of the truth they will stick at nothing," she said severely. "And what kind of wife will she make—a girl who has been trained like that?"

"My dear," she said solemnly to Di, who was sipping her hot tea in haste to be gone,

“Thine own friends and thy father’s forsake not.’ You’ve been but little here of late, and that’s not pretty behaviour to Mrs. Gordon and me who have known you all your days. And it’s my duty to warn you, child, if you think to pass us by for certain folks we won’t name, you’ll live to repent it.”

There was real feeling under the veil of severity, and the girl was touched.

“I will come again soon,” she said. “I must go now; it is getting quite dark.”

Miss Barbara’s warning was kindly meant, but it was impossible to accept it. Was not Mrs. Henshaw her father’s friend too—an older friend than these? and Philippa—how could she forsake her?

She went over to Mrs. Gordon’s sofa, where Felix was lingering.

“Will you lend me Maria?” she whispered. “The padre would scold if I went alone.”

“Yes, dear child; I never dreamt of your going alone. Ring, and I will tell Maria to hasten her toilet. Perhaps we can persuade her to go without her Sunday mantilla.”

“May I go?” said Felix eagerly, coming forward. “Do let me see you home, Miss Ouvry. I’ve nothing to do for an hour or more yet. Miss Barbara will tell you I’m a most staid and worthy young man.”

"You may let me speak for myself, I think," said that lady, quitting her teacups. "The best I ever said of you is that you might be worse."

"Nowadays that is an irreproachable character," said Felix, knowing himself to be a favourite. "Miss Ouvry, after that testimonial, will you go with me?"

"I am taking you away——"

"Miss Barbara will thank you for that," said this audacious young man. "And it will spare Maria's feelings."

"Of course she'll go. She knows very well there's no getting Maria back when once you let her out."

Di was the only one who did not think this arrangement very comfortable. She would much rather have had Maria.

The young man, as he very well knew, had made a good impression on the two solitary ladies. They liked his frankness, his youth, his sunny temper—what might be called the artlessness of his abundant candour—as women do, who have left all these things behind them. "He might have been my son," the mother of lost children used to think as she listened to his outpourings. "He might have been my brother;" Miss Barbara remembered the one strong and tender affection of her life.

He tossed back his head, lounged in the best chair, crumpled the antimacassars, poured out his confidences to the one lady and openly laughed at the other, and they both liked it. Di, who was precious to them both, might be trusted to his care.


"He won't put silly notions into her head; he's a lad of principle for all his lightness," was Miss Barbara's too trusting verdict as she saw them set out. "And Di is but a bairn yet. If I thought she would fall into that other girl's ways——"

"I've a fine story to tell you, Mary, now that we are alone," she said, going back to her sister's sofa, but first carefully shutting the door, and making a minute search behind all the larger pieces of furniture, as if some eaves-dropper might by chance be lurking there. "It's all true. I made that silly body Amelia Piper tell me everything."

"Mrs. St. John has been here."

"Then it's all over the town already, depend on it."

While she told her tale, with much head-shaking and severe comment, the two, who were both keenly interested in the same matter, walked through the lighted streets without so much as remotely hinting at it. Di was relieved that her companion was silent, and yet



sorry. If she could have summoned courage, there was a word she would fain have said, but the moment to say it did not come.

"You were speaking of the sea in the north," she said. "Have you ever been in Scotland?"

"Yes. I was thinking of an island up there when we looked at the plain. It's a solitary enough place, and I dare say you never heard of it."

"What is it called?" she asked, with a note of eagerness in her voice.

"St. Lasrian. After some forgotten saint, I suppose."

"Oh, but I do know all about it!" she cried. "That is just my island."

"Your island?"

"Yes. And I wonder when you were there if you ever met my cousin Bell?"

"Bell," he repeated, with fine gravity. "Miss Bell——"

"Fullarton," said Di promptly. "Have you met her?"

Now, on this special island with the saintly name there are almost as many Fullartons as there are trees. Felix recalled his friend's gamekeeper, his boatman, the postmistress, the minister, the minister's man; the farmer on the hill above, the farmer in the valley below, but

for a Miss Bell Fullarton he searched his memory in vain.

"I am afraid——" he began, feeling wonderfully disappointed. "Can you tell me where she lives? It isn't a big place, but there is such a clan of them. They are as thick as the famous Vallombrosa leaves."

"Kylmure. At least, I write to her there sometimes; but I think she once told me she sent some distance for her letters."

Felix went in imagination all over the little hamlet by the sea. He ordered the inhabitants to turn out for review; he did miles of walking over hills and glens in that brief moment of pondering, but he did not catch the most distant glimpse of Miss Bell Fullarton.

"What is she like?" he asked, as a last chance, as if it were probable he should be familiar with her face and not have heard her name in that distant little colony, where everybody knows all about you, from the first hour of your arrival.

"I can't tell you," said Di; and they both laughed. "I have never seen her. She is my only cousin. Her mother was papa's half-sister, and she died a long time ago. Bell must be quite old."

"Oh, an old lady! There is an old Miss Fullarton, who live in a glen near Kylmure.

She wears a 'mutch'—do you know what a 'mutch' is?—and she goes about with a big walking-stick."

"Oh, but that can't be Bell. I didn't mean old like that—only not a girl. I don't know what her age is, but she always writes as if she thought me quite a child; and sometimes she tells me that this is a degenerate age, and that nobody can do things as they were done long ago, and it is that that makes me think that she is old."

"But you don't believe her? All that talk about the perfection of the past is humbug, you know."

"Well, perhaps. I don't think I want anything changed. And what is the use of always wishing you were your own grandmother? You can't change yourself into her."

"Heaven forbid!" said Felix lightly. "Fortunately, no amount of trying can bring about the transformation."

"Bell is very clever. She has found out a great many things. She has found out that English people are all shallow."

"Do you call that a sign of genius?"

Di laughed at his tragic air.

"And she says I ought to be very thankful to be Scotch. But I think, if people are nice, it doesn't much matter where they were born, does it?"

"No," said Felix. "I've a host of friends in the north, but if one's only chance of virtue lay in being a Scot, that would be a poor look-out for you and me; for, Miss Bell may say what she likes, she can't claim you for a countrywoman when you've never even seen the land of the thistle."

"Papa is half Scotch, and so Bell admits me into the clan; but mamma was English, I think. I hear from Bell just twice every year; she writes to me at Christmas, and I answer her letter, and then she writes to me again in June. But I'm afraid my letters are very stupid; I never know what to say."

"You can't bewail the present and lament the past?"

"Well, no. I am quite satisfied with the present."

"And so she writes to you in June. If I am up there then, perhaps you will let me be the bearer of your answer. If I was very meek and proper, don't you think I might persuade her that there are one or two who have the misfortune to call themselves English, and who are yet not wholly and irrecoverably bad?"

Di laughed.

"I wish I could see her," she said. "She is the only relation I have in the world, except papa."

"You will let me take that letter?"

"Oh yes. And some day you will tell me about Kylmure?"

They had reached the open entrance to the house, and the portress had thrust her head out of her glass box, and was dangling the key on her finger.

"Papa must be out," Di said, noticing this. "Perhaps some other time——" She turned to him hesitatingly.

"May I?" he asked eagerly. "May I call on you some day—some evening? I should like to know Mr. Ouvry better—Ralph has often talked of him," said this cunning youth—"if he wouldn't think me a bore? And I will tell you all about St. Lasrian, the island of mountain and sea."

"Yes, come," said Di, holding out her hand frankly. "Papa will like to see you very much, and——"

She paused, startled by a fleeting glimpse of a face that looked in upon them from the street, and vanished in a moment.

"What was it? Did anything frighten you?" he asked.

He stepped to the door and glanced out. Mr. Ferryman's retreating figure, revealed by the light of a lamp under which he passed, was easily recognized. Felix involuntarily felt in

his pocket for a letter he had that morning received—a letter from his old friend Smith, of Liverpool. A grim smile settled about his lips. He muttered something under his breath.

“You were alarmed,” he said, turning back to her. “That fellow——”

“No, no,” said Di eagerly; “he did nothing to frighten me—nothing at all. It was silly of me to be startled.”

“If I thought——” he began, with a darkening brow.

“It was nothing,” she interrupted him. In her eagerness to assure him, she laid her hand on his sleeve, forgetting her timidity. She remembered only that dreadful rumour of the young men's hatred towards each other, of the possibility of their coming to blows. It had been forgotten while they talked, and now it all came back to her with a sudden pain.

“Oh, don't do anything to make him angry,” she said, feeling that she must speak. “Don't quarrel with him. He is cruel. He would have no pity.”

“Thank you,” said Felix very gently. “You are too good, too kind, to think of me.”

“And you will—you will take care?”

“Yes, I will take care,” he answered, with a smile. “He will not harm me.”

She stood, with parted lips and wide eyes,

looking after him as he went, not hearing the loud salutations of the portress, who had watched this little scene. She could not conquer the faint dread at her heart, the throb of sudden fear she had felt when that dark, angry face looked into her own.

Felix crossed the square with his head very erect. It seemed to him that only to talk to this young girl, to feel the touch of her hand on his arm, to look into her pleading eyes, had conferred some new grace on him. It was his knight's investiture. He felt richer, better.

Yet, when he reached his room, and pulled out the letter, the old expression of half-cynical humour returned to his lips. It was another lady he had promised to defend, not this one, whom he blessed for her kind thought of him. He glanced at his watch. "Time for our little appointment. Harm me?" He laughed aloud. "No, Felix, my boy, it will do you a world of good."

Straightway he pulled his cap over his brows and marched out of the house.

CHAPTER IV.

"The quarrel is a very pretty quarrel as it stands ; we should only spoil it by trying to explain it."

WHEN you are full of fears, shaken by forebodings, troubled touching the safety of one about whom a little spring of interest has risen within you, you may be forgiven for feeling the expression of your neighbour's frank contentment a little oppressive.

Thus Deonys, having done nothing more than take off her hat with slow fingers, while her mind was rapidly following Felix's retreating figure, was as nearly cross as it was possible for one of her sweet-tempered nature to be, when an arm suddenly encircled her waist, and she felt herself whirled about the salon in a giddy waltz.

"Philippa, let me go," she cried, struggling to be free. "What do you mean?"

"There!" said Philippa, bringing her with one last turn to the safe anchorage of the old

sofa, "wasn't that neatly done? I call that a nice piece of piloting, with all these peninsulas and islands and reefs of furniture in the way. Don't you feel better, my child?"

"Philippa, I don't understand you."

Deonys threw off her jacket. She was hot and tired and a trifle indignant.

"I don't understand myself," she answered, dancing slowly down the room. "It's such a rare sensation for Philippa Henshaw to be on good terms with herself. Di, don't you think I've grown an inch or two since you saw me?" She came to a pause before her friend. "I can stand it, you know. I'm not 'tall to reach the pole,' like the man in Mr. Watts's verses."

She drew herself up and lifted her chin.

"I feel morally bigger, at any rate."

"I wish you would talk sense," said Di, in a melancholy little voice. "I suppose you have got something to say?"

"To say? I could shout it aloud, if it weren't for shocking Mr. Ouvry."

"Papa is out; but I wish you wouldn't shout. I'm tired."

"Tired? you poor little woman! What has made you tired?"

Philippa went and knelt down before the sofa.

"Tell me about it. What did it?"

"Oh, things," said Di lucidly.

"What things?" Philippa asked turning up her face inquisitively.

"I don't know—about you, some of them."

"About me? This grows serious."

"Yes, horrid gossip. Don't ask me about it."

"Where have you been?" Philippa asked, flushing slightly.

"At Mrs. Gordon's. Mrs. St. John came in. Oh, I forgot, you don't know her."

"If one may judge by your voice," said Philippa merrily, "I don't lose much."

"No, she isn't nice; she says horrid things. There, don't let us speak about her."

"But if she has been speaking about me? Di," she said impulsively, "she can't have told you my great news. You surely would have looked a little glad——"

"What news?" Di asked quickly.

Was it true, then, that Felix—— And yet he had said nothing.

"Quick, tell me," she said.

"He has left," said Philippa, with brief impressiveness.

"Who has left?"

"Why, Di!" cried Philippa, giving her a little shake, "where are your thoughts wandering to? *He*, of course, that man—that tallow, soap, cotton, Manchester man. I can't bear even to call him by his name."

"But I saw him five minutes ago." Di stared at her friend.

"Oh, you literal child, he is going to-night, in an hour or so, by the express. I dare say he would be glad to leave this minute, but, unfortunately, they won't alter the train service, even for an enraged lover."

"Are you sure—are you quite sure?"

"My dear, I shall bless 'business' all my life. It's a rise in the market, or a fall in the market, I'm sure I don't know which—that is my rival."

"You are sure?" Di asked again, with a quick, eager light in her eyes. "There is no mistake, he is going to-night by the early train? He will only have time to pack up his things; not to see any one."

"No," said Philippa, laughing and wondering. "Were you anxious to say good-bye to him?"

"I?" She put out her hand with a gesture of disgust. "Oh, I am glad!" She gave a great sigh.

Philippa looked at her grave face wistfully. Her eyes were absently fixed on the window, her thoughts far distant.

"Are you thinking of me at all?" she said at last gently.

Di moved her head, and the light returned to her eyes.

"Now we can be comfortable again. The old times will come back," she said.

It was like waking out of an ugly nightmare. For the moment the great news was enough—the sense of deliverance from a brooding fear; but presently a wonder, as to how it all came about, crept in.

"How did it happen?" she asked. "Tell me about it."

"The money was paid. Mamma paid it." Philippa looked down on the carpet.

"But I thought——" She paused, suddenly aware that she was about to say a rude thing.

"You thought she hadn't the money to give?" The words were spoken with a visible effort.

"I am very glad I was wrong," Di said, in a low voice.

"You were quite right, she hadn't it to give, I believe; but she got it—somehow. I don't want to know anything about it. Don't you understand how much better it is for me not to know anything?" she said urgently. "It was honestly got, and the man took it, and there is an end of it. He is going away; and I hope I'll never, never see him again!"

Something in this speech made the listener feel strangely uncomfortable. Philippa had saved herself, but—— Di hated herself for that

"but,"—that underlying doubt. She passed over everything in her answer, except the last words.

"You need never see him again. He won't put himself in your way, if it was only the money he wanted after all."

"Oh, he wanted me, too, as a sort of expensive ornament to his house, the newest artistic decoration," said Philippa, with a smile curling her lips; "but, as he could not get me, he was glad enough to take the sum he paid for me. It would have been hard for him to lose both."

"Wait a minute," said Di, who had listened with a divided mind. "I think, after all, I will tell you what they are saying about you."

"Do," said Philippa, with some bitterness. "It is so nice to know what people's candid opinion of you is."

"They say you made appointments with him at Miss Piper's. I told them there wasn't a word of truth in it; but I want you to tell Miss Barbara so yourself. You mustn't mind if I think of Miss Piper first; she is such an old friend, and any gossip like that would hurt her so much. Miss Barbara wouldn't spare her, I'm afraid."

"But it is true."

The hot colour flamed into Philippa's cheeks, as she met the wondering reproach of Di's eyes.

"Oh, Di, was there anything so dreadfully wrong in it? I thought it was the safest place to go, and I had to meet him. You can suppose it wasn't for pleasure I went."

"Miss Barbara will never forgive her—never; and Miss Piper leans so on her opinion, though she is afraid of her. Oh, it was cruel!"

"I meant no harm," Philippa pleaded, looking into the flushed, indignant face. "She was—— Oh, do forgive me, but I must laugh," she said, dimpling all over. "If you saw her dress, and the preparations she made—all the miniatures were labelled, that he might take in her pedigree at a glance—one would have thought it was she who was going to reject him, and not I."

"I see nothing to laugh at," said Di coldly. "I am sure you made her very unhappy."

"But think of her age," said Philippa plaintively. "She must be ever so much older than your father. I will go down on my knees to Miss Barbara, if you like, and tell her it was all my fault. Di, don't look so unmerciful. I meant no harm."

"That man!" said Di, with an expressive action of the hands. "She who is so timid!"

"She wasn't present," said Philippa eagerly. "Since I am confessing, let me tell you everything. I had to meet him. There were things

I had to get back—letters and other things he was mean enough to keep, to hold over me.”

“Letters?” Di echoed, wondering when she was to understand the whole of the affair. “So you corresponded?”

“You press me cruelly,” said Philippa, with rising agitation. “It was only at first. He wrote to me, and I had to answer. Mamma made me. No,” she corrected herself, “that isn’t honest, I did it of my own accord. But I had no sooner done it than I repented. That is my way. My repentances are like the American storm-warnings, they always come too late to be of any use.”

She looked up with a suspicion of a smile, but Di would not be betrayed into amusement. She was very solemn.

“I can’t think how you could ever make up your mind to write at all.”

“I told you I repented”—this with a little pout—“in sackcloth and ashes, or at least in a waterproof and thick boots, like a ‘personally conducted’ young woman. We were in Rome then, and I didn’t allow myself a single pretty thing; and, if you knew the Roman shops, you would understand what that means. We were so far away, and it all seemed so distant, and I had almost forgotten how hateful his presence had been to me. But I have suffered for it. I

don't think, in spite of my act of penance, I have ever respected myself since."

"You got them back?"

Di tried without marked success to speak sympathetically.

"Yes, oh yes, I got them back. If I did wrong I was well punished for it. I think that was about the worst half-hour I have had in my life," she said bitterly; "and I've had some moments that you wouldn't envy me. But I got them back, and I put them in the fire, and reduced them to ashes. I wish I could burn out the remembrance of that hateful time as easily."

She turned away her head. Something in the dejected attitude, in the rare sadness of the bright, beautiful face, touched Di and brought back her wavering allegiance.

"Never mind," she said with fine tenderness, "it's all over now, and we can begin again. To-morrow, I will go and see Miss Piper."

"And I will go with you," said Philippa, brightening under this kindness. No," she corrected herself with quick intuition; "I dare say you would like best to go alone. Poor little woman! I believe it reconciled her to everything to know that I sent him away; and yet she couldn't help being kind to him and trying to soften the blow. She wanted to show him

the miniatures—perhaps the sight of that fat old Mrs. Piper, with the wonderful turban, might have served as a warning, for she was a sylph, like me, once, it seems—but he had the grace to take leave. Indeed, I would never have let him annoy her.”

“I should hope not. Philippa,” she asked suddenly, “what made you play that day your mother lunched with us?”

“It was a triumphal march.” She looked up with mischievous archness. “I couldn’t help it. I got my letters back that morning; and I took the chance of being alone to make a funeral pyre. After burning my past, it seemed the right thing to do to begin life with music—a sort of flourish of trumpets to announce my return from captivity. I’m afraid it wasn’t very well received, was it? Did it spoil your lunch?”

“Don’t talk about it, it is done, let us bury it, too,” said Di, rising to put an end to further confidences. She would not ask any questions, but it needed a very slight effort of memory to feel certain that Mrs. Henshaw had at that time found no means of repaying the debt she had contracted. With what arguments, then—with what further promises, cajolements, protests—had Philippa prevailed in her interview with so hard a creditor? How had she got back the letters?

She put away from her, as much as was possible, her creeping doubt, but she could not so easily silence it. She remembered the scenes of the past weeks vividly, as we remember the first moment of disenchantment, the hour in which "some dear expectation dies." But doubt with her never meant less love, rather more. One might so easily be wrong in mistrusting another, but one could never love too much, she would have said if she had cared to analyze her feeling at all.

As it was, she only kissed Philippa, and went, like a prosaic young person, to put away her hat and inspect the contents of the larder, intent on making of the simple supper a little feast to mark what Philippa was pleased to call her return from bondage.

Next day, while she was paying that visit of sympathy to Miss Piper, trembling in her high dove cot under Miss Barbara's displeasure, Ralph Malleson was speeding from the south to the north.

The day was hot, and the journey tiresome, since it had ceased to have any novelty for him. He was glad to be returning home, but irritated by the slow rate at which the miles decreased. There was but one other occupant of the carriage—a man whose head and face were completely enveloped in the folds of his cape,

revealing nothing but the tip of a frosty nose. Malleson wasted a great deal of speculation on this silent figure. The desire to have a glimpse of his remaining features grew urgent. He had an uncanny sense of a sombre eye keeping watch on all his restless movements. He coughed, he changed his seat, raised and lowered the windows without result. The man grew to have a kind of fascination for him. Should he speak aloud and force a reply from this motionless mummy, and so break the spell?

While he was debating within himself what to say, the train slowed and finally came to a stand at a station; the figure in the corner roused itself, gathered about it its shawls, rugs, heavy hooded cloak, and silently made its exit from the carriage. Ralph poked his head out of the window and examined the platform, but in vain—his dumb companion had vanished. He always afterwards declared that he had travelled with a ghost, and made a very neat and thrilling little story out of it for the wonderment of his friends.

He got out, and by way of enlivenment purchased all the newspapers he could lay his hands on, and these were not few. The station was of considerable size; but there were not many travellers, and the guard, driver and other officials alighted for a social squabble

over rival politics. Nobody seemingly was in any hurry, and apparently the chief business of the hour was the readjusting of the affairs of the kingdom. Before the bell rang and the loitering passengers took their seats, Spain had passed through a tremendous crisis, and emerged the first of European Powers.

Malleson had, meantime, made a notable collection of literature of every shade and hue. For a time he read diligently: now a courteous reminder to Amadeo that the air of Italy would benefit his constitution, and that Spain, the noble and generous, would make no mean haggling over the price of a ticket (not a return one) for that country; now the latest Carlist scare, or the newest manifesto of the Montpensarists, the Isabella faction, the Radicals, Democrats, Socialists; the hundred and one parties struggling for the mastery, each of them expressing frank and cordial hatred of the others. All this is apt to be depressing, even to a sanguine spirit unliable to pessimistic fears. Malleson tossed the flimsy sheets aside, and fell, by way of a little cheer, to thinking about himself.

A great authority has lately told us that history, by virtue of its being a travelling in the past, is a species of culture. One's own history—so immensely more important to oneself

than that of a nation—ought, then, to be a very refining and improving study. Malleson found it easy to argue thus, but less easy to extract any “sweetness or light” out of his own ended story. As for the future, well, was it so impossible that the future should redeem the days that were gone? Must the past always dominate his life? Might not he, too, put out his hand and claim the days to come as others did? It was a bold thought, but it had for him a great charm.

It is dreary work, this looking behind over the long-travelled road of sorrowful experience; but for the unseen way in front there is always the sunshine of hope. For a little while he gave himself up to the entertainment of this vision of a larger, more vivid life that might yet be his. The thought of it brought others to his memory, and prevented, to the great benefit of his temper, a too-exclusive dwelling on himself.

There was Felix—what rash adventures had that quixotic youth been engaged in? and Philippa, that fair enslaver, how many new conquests had she made? And Di—it is not needful to state that Di hardly came third in the order of his thoughts. There was great restfulness in every memory of this young girl with the frank, serious eyes. He had brought

some trifling trinkets for her and her friend from a famous silversmith's in Seville. He took out the little packet, and, unwrapping the thin paper, laid them on the seat before him, pleasing himself hugely with the thought of her pleasure. He would go soon—that night, perhaps—and present them. He pictured her girlish delight when he produced the chain of many fragile links, and the silver arrow, such as he had seen German maidens wear in their thick brown braids.

Thus restored to good humour, he was ready to welcome a number of fellow travellers when the train stopped at the last station before the capital. All the new-comers were smoking cigarettes; but between the meditative puffs they talked, with much politeness and pomp of phrase; politics, gossip, scandal, perhaps. Malle-son listened vaguely, thinking chiefly of his supper. At the last moment something was said that arrested his wandering thoughts, something touching the latest manifestation of English oddity. "A duel," said one, "in which both combatants were killed." "No, no," corrected another; "a much more tame affair—no question of wounds at all. A little punishment administered in the English fashion—what you call a match of boxing; a mere trifle—not a drop of blood spilt." A third sug-

gested, with great civility, that a horsewhip was the instrument employed, and added some harrowing particulars as to the state of the victim. The occasion of the quarrel alone seemed a matter beyond dispute. In the land of chivalry and honour, and other high-sounding words, you might make quite certain that there was a lady in the background. The story might have gone through endless variations but that the bustle of arrival cut it short.

Ralph jumped out, grim, but determined, thinking no longer of his supper. Felix, that impulsive youth, must first be found and called to give an account of himself before he could wash off the stains of travel, or sit down to a comfortable meal.

He threw himself into a cab, drove straight to the hotel, and ran up to his cousin's rooms. There were evident signs of the young man's recent presence, lavish comfort, and equally lavish untidiness, but the owner himself was nowhere visible. The door of the bedroom stood open, and he walked in. It was with a feeling of relief that he found the bed unoccupied, except by certain stray possessions, overflowings of Felix's extensive wardrobe, which had found convenient resting-place there. He had half expected to discover a sick and sorrowful penitent, ready to submit

meekly to his reproaches; but, though he was relieved to find himself mistaken, he was annoyed at Felix's absence. The armchair looked very inviting after a lengthened railway journey, and from below came savoury odours of dinner.

He rushed here and there in growing wrath, hungry and cross. The boy had vanished, leaving no trace behind. In his further search for him, Ralph encountered the story with which Madrid was, for the moment, amusing itself over and over again. It took as many subtle forms as a tale whispered in that game we call Russian scandal, which, passing from ear to ear, comes out finally in an entirely new dress. The only particular to which every one stuck obstinately was that which made Felix the fair-haired the victor.

At last, after much expenditure of time and temper, the young man, about whom gossip was busy, was discovered in a remote eating-house.

"What is this that I hear about you?" Ralph said, as sternly as he could, waving off the boy's joyful welcome.

Felix shrugged his shoulders.

"How can I tell?" he said lightly. "What are they kind enough to say about me?"

"Say about you! Oh, they are making a fine story of it. You've made the place too

hot to hold you, I can tell you," said Ralph grimly. "What have you done with that man?"

"With what man?" said Felix innocently.

"Come, I'm in earnest." Ralph spoke irritably. "Out with it. What have you been about?"

"Done with him?" Felix stared, and then he burst out laughing. "Do they say I have cooked and eaten him, and hidden the bones in the cellar, or garrotted him, or given him a blow from behind, or——"

"Or fought a duel with him?" said Malleson dryly. "Suppose you come to the truth."

"A duel!" said Felix contemptuously. "So that is the story! Not very likely. Do you suppose a mean hound like that had pluck enough to fight, even if I had challenged him?"

"Where is he now?"

Felix's eyes had a suspicious twinkle in them.

"In bed at Avila, if he's a wise man."

"There is some foundation for all this fine talk, I suppose?"

"Very likely; but Spanish imagination is accountable for a good deal of embellishment. The fellow was insolent, and I let him know it."

"What business was it of yours?" growled the older man. "You are always in scrapes."

"I begun with reminding him of a few

trifling particulars about himself," Felix went on, "which I happened to learn, and then I gave him a little instruction in manners. I'm afraid he wasn't grateful—not at all grateful." He laughed at the remembrance of the scene.

"You are not to be trusted," said Ralph, walking angrily up and down, his hands thrust in his pockets. The room was almost empty, and he spoke in English, secure in not being understood. "You might have thought of the flood of gossip you would let loose about the ladies you were so eager to defend."

"Pooh! It will never reach them."

"You are a rash, hot-headed boy. Will you ever learn sense?"

"Oh yes," said Felix, with perfect temper, laying his hand on his friend's shoulder, "when I am as old as you. Look here, old man, you are hungry. Come and eat my supper." He pulled him without much resistance to the table. "Do you smell that stew? Sit down, sit down, and tuck this napkin under your chin. I'll tell you everything when you have fed, but defend me from the criticism of a starving man!"

CHAPTER V.

"But when Alasnam came to consult the mirror, the glass, fatal touchstone, was dimmed."

"Do you know what every one will think—what they will confidently expect to happen next?"

Felix had made his confession, as he had promised, but not until his cousin's appetite had been appeased, and his asperity softened by an excellent meal. The friends were walking under the starlight to Malleson's rooms, in the northern suburb. Felix had been very frank, and Ralph was reassured. The affair had been a mere bit of boyish indiscretion, and, in spite of his apparent disapproval, he found in his heart some sympathy for the lad's chivalrous impulse.

"I wasn't going to have them insulted," said Felix, with his chin in the air, "and stand by tamely. I did him no harm, though he made a precious row." He laughed, as he did at every remembrance of his valour.

"Did she appeal to you?" Ralph had asked, not without a shade of contempt in his voice.

"Miss Henshaw?"

"Miss Henshaw, of course."

"No," said Felix shortly, "she did not."

He was very reticent on this point. He said nothing at all of an appeal that had been made to him by the other lady, and which he had promptly met. There were some things that, for all his ready frankness, he carried in his heart, and never told his friend.

They had reached the door of the house where Malleson had rooms. He whistled on the watchman, whose light was visible in the distance; and while they waited for the key, Ralph turned round and asked that question:—

"Do you know what every one will think—what they will confidently expect to happen next?"

He was capable of using this threat as an argument in his irritation, but he knew it was a weak subterfuge.

Felix surprised him by saying nothing at all. Silence on this young man's part was at all times significant.

"So—— There are more confessions to come!" he said a little dryly.

He laid his hand on the boy's shoulder. Felix shook it off almost roughly.

"Why should I mind what people choose to expect?" he cried. "I'm not going to dance to their piping. Look here, Ralph, I dare say you mean well, and I've always told you everything, but you can push a fellow too far, you know."

"All right. I'll restrain my devouring curiosity," Ralph said calmly, examining this new mood with interest.

"There's nothing to be curious about. When there is, I'll let you know. If you think I'm going to bother myself about the gossip of the Puerta——" He marched off, with his head in the air.

"Good-night," said Malleeson, taking the key from the seréno, who had approached.

"Good-night," Felix echoed, his voice coming already faintly out of the darkness, for he walked off at a great pace, leaving his friend and mentor to ponder in solitude over this new and quickly developed humour. Nothing that Felix did or could do surprised the older man much. He was used to his lavish display of emotion, to his fancies and his likings, all of them hot, and few of them lasting.

There had been other fevers through which he had nursed the boy patiently, half amused, half scornful over his quick convalescence; yet he had, somehow, expected this attack to take

powerful hold, and to prove more troublesome. It did not disappoint him to find himself mistaken, if that was the reading to put on the young fellow's petulance. The love that was to raise, to steady, to make a man of him, was not in Philippa's gift. Malleson, in his blindness, always pictured a distant future, out of which some noble, unknown lady was to step, who should have the making of his young cousin in her hands. He never dreamed of possible pain to himself; of any call to self-sacrifice in the matter.

Meanwhile, on this, the night of his return to Madrid, he held that he had wasted time enough on so frivolous a subject; and, having tossed the contents of his portmanteau into a drawer and piled his papers on the table, he seized on a novel, drew his ancient armchair to the fire, and, with a shrug, dismissed Felix from his mind.

Nevertheless, his remark remained true. Everybody looked for but one result from Felix's championship.

When the rumour, somewhat distorted and garbled, reached the two ladies in their lonely home in the north of the city, there was much eloquence and a great deal of bitterness expended on the affair. Miss Barbara admired the spirit that was worthy of a Gordon, but

hated that it should be manifested on behalf of so unworthy a subject. She condemned Philippa, in spite of the girl's pretty apologies and protests; her pouts and her smiles, and even Di's pleadings had won her at the best but a cold tolerance. Other things might be forgiven her, but that she should win or be about to win, Felix, who might have aspired to the hand of a Gordon, was not to be forgiven her. Miss Barbara had cherished other schemes for her favourite, and the failure of these was visited also on Philippa.

Mr. Ouvry listened to the buzz of the cafés with smiling, contemptuous blandness. It was folly, but young men were foolish and rash. He crossed one white hand over the other. If this were to be the termination of Mrs. Henshaw's little troubles, it was well; specially well that she should escape them by other aid than his. He paid her a little visit, perhaps of congratulation. He spoke playfully of himself as a poor man—a very poor man; a man for whom wealth had no charms; but he hinted delicately that when good fortune fell at the feet of his friends he was the first to rejoice.

Mrs. Henshaw, without directly responding, received him graciously. Her plan had succeeded with less pain to her than she had dreaded, and she had bloomed out again into

the handsome matron of former days. She let Philippa arrange her hair in the most becoming fashion, and adorn it with delicate lace. She ordered Blake to hide the limp gown and severe head-dress out of sight; she wished no reminder of her past humiliation.

So, when Mr. Ouvry paid that timely visit, there was restored pleasantness in the gilded salon. The hostess moved and spoke once more like a woman who understands what is expected of her, and knows how to be agreeable. Mr. Ouvry liked agreeable people. He liked the rich rustle of her dress, the faint odour of perfume as she moved, the tone of renewed comfort in her voice. He sank into the easiest chair, and accepted the cup of tea that was offered; he listened very complacently, as she skimmed airily over the surface of things, touching no longer on disturbing topics. He forgave her silliness. Women were meant to please and not to instruct; and how much better and wiser was this behaviour than tears and protests! He was not going to be indiscreet or to pry, but he let her know, in the most delicate manner, that she had his sympathy and approval.

"Ah, yes," she answered, not quite able to forget that he had shown little eagerness to sympathize before, "if Philippa is happy, I can forget all I have suffered at the hands of others,

Injuries to myself I never found it difficult to pardon."

"Your charity does you infinite credit," he said, bent on being pleasant.

"And there is your daughter," she continued, anxious to show him to what a height of magnanimity she could rise. "She must come oftener; we must see more of her. I bear her no grudge; and I have brought Philippa up in ignorance of everything. I have always held that one's children should know nothing of old family quarrels."

"Very right; most creditable," he murmured again.

"Of course, she can't help being Mary's daughter; but I trust I am too just to blame her for that; and, after I have settled my dear Philippa, I am quite willing to extend my help to her. Oh, we ladies can do a great deal. A little bird has whispered a charming plan to me," she nodded mysteriously.

"I am sure my child would thank you," he said mildly, "for any kindness you may wish to show her; but, as for plans."—he shrugged his shoulders slightly—"she is but a child, a little girl of eighteen."

"Oh, girls of eighteen have their secrets and plans, too," she retorted archly.

"Very likely; but, as for myself, I may seem

to you very remiss, very lacking in foresight, but I really have no intentions for my little Di."

"You want some help, you see. Of course, there are few so attractive as my Philippa; but Deonys, with a little dressing, would really be quite pretty and presentable. We shall see, we shall see. I promise nothing, and my own dear child must come first, as is but natural."

"Ah," said Mr. Ouvry, smiling sadly, "you mothers can always keep your daughters; marriage does not separate you; but with us, when the lover steps in, the father is forgotten. No, no. I am in no haste to part with my little Di."

He spoke truly. Love for her was the strongest emotion his nature was capable of. It was not of the high or heroic order, but it was true so far as it went. He did not want to lose her—at least, not yet. A time might come when it would be well to think of these things, but it had not yet come. Still, Mrs. Henshaw's conduct had pleased him, and he marked his approval of it by saying carelessly to Di that same evening—

"My child, you must be a little more attentive to our friend downstairs, eh?"

"Philippa comes here," Di answered quickly.

"But you don't go there?"

"Do you want me to go, padre?"

"There is Mrs. Henshaw ; we must try to make things a little pleasant for her."

"Do you want to invite her to lunch again ?" she asked, with the remembrance of that hateful meal she had shared strong upon her.

"You can do that, if you like ; but all I meant to suggest was, that you might run down oftener, and spend an hour with her in the evening. It is good for you, and my affairs take me so much away from you."

"Very well, padre. Of course, if you wish it," she answered reluctantly ; "but I am never dull."

She did not give any reason for her reluctance, and her father did not ask one. Philippa, too, seemed hardly to notice that she came less often. Philippa was once more all smiles and sunshine, as full of merry talk and affectionate ways, that were hard to resist, as if Deonys had never had a glimpse into the shadowy side of her life. She had buried her trouble, and expected others to walk serenely as she did over its grave.


Perhaps, of all the little circle of people compelled to think urgently of her and her affairs, Felix Chester and Deonys Ouvry alone failed to fall completely under the old charm. Each knew too much. For each the first moment of disenchantment had arrived.

Di, troubled and burdened by her doubts, said to herself a hundred times a day—

“It was he who paid the money, and now he will marry her; and it was I who put the thought into their minds.”

This foolish fancy haunted her. Had she done him good or ill by her impulsive words? She looked at him wistfully every time they met, trying to read his heart. She hoped, and yet she feared; she had lost her old tranquillity.

As for Felix, in spite of his anger at Ralph's prophecy, he went as often as ever to Mrs. Henshaw's drawing-room. Perhaps he forced himself to go more frequently, because his feet would have preferred to climb higher; perhaps because he wished to overlay with many new experiences, and to banish from his own memory and from hers the recollection of that interview to which Mrs. Henshaw had summoned him. Philippa had not been present. He caught himself often wondering if she knew anything about it; if she did, she showed no sign. She treated him with the old open and confiding friendliness. She made not the remotest allusion to their late visitor; never thanked him for his championship by a single look; told him, indeed, by every tone of her voice and turn of her head, that she wished to bury that episode out of sight.



But the young man could not obey, or, at least, not at once. He had learned so much within these days which he could not forget; so much had happened that he was forced to remember. Those blue eyes of his, so frank and open in their gaze, were graver now when they rested on her; they had a way of falling sometimes before her merry looks. He had been so near, so very near to love; and now? He looked at her strangely, as if she were a dear friend who had died. Was she the same Philippa whom he had been so eager to defend? Prince Alasnam, if you please, imagined he had found the perfect lady; but, when he looked in his mirror, behold the beautiful face was blurred and dim.

Mrs. Henshaw was nervously eager in her friendliness, and he met all her advances gently, very gently. One might say that the young man was growing suddenly older, and losing something of the boy.

As often as he could, he would go upstairs when Mr. Ouvry was at home, and listen to that gentleman's bland discourse. He proved a capital listener. For the most part, Di sat near the window, sewing by the light of her own little lamp, more diligent now than before. Felix played with her birds, teased them, wakened them, and made them tumble off their

perches; sometimes he looked at her, but they spoke little to each other.

But time goes on, and the troubles of heart and mind grow less, and love and friendship are not the only interests of life.

December came—the December of sharper airs and a sky of more full-toned blue. There were hints of coming festivity in the crowded streets, and flocks of unhappy turkeys were driven into the city, and gorged by relentless hands. Felix, in his wanderings through the streets often watched the process with laughter—the melancholy bird pinioned between the knees of an old woman seated on a doorstep: such an old woman as one only sees in Spain, yellow as parchment, and with lustrous, wicked black eyes. She holds the beak open with one hand, and with the other pops the pellets of food down the reluctant throat; while the brown-skinned children dance about her, and clap their hands as the plateful disappears.

While the Plaza Major, where once the fires of the Inquisition were lighted, was being made ready for milder Christmas merriment, there came one of those sudden scares for which the capital of this country is famous.

Mrs. Henshaw woke one morning to find she had narrowly missed a great opportunity. To have been besieged, barricaded, blockaded; who

would not have chosen the discomfort for the sake of the fame? When Ralph Malleson ran up to assure the ladies that there was no cause for alarm, he found the elder one writing a long account of it all to a correspondent in London. Miss Piper had flown down trembling to the shelter of the Preciados; Miss Barbara, who was also present, cast at her grim looks of disapproval, and almost scorn. Philippa was dramatically, and with secret glee, detailing all the particulars—militia called out; windows of all the public buildings bristling with guns; three policemen shot; barricades erected at the Toledo gate; grim determination on the part of the authorities to defend the capital at all hazards.

“You believe it all, I suppose?” said Ralph, glancing at her, and then looking across at Di, who sat a little apart, with a smile.

“Wicked man!” Philippa shook her head at him. “Don’t tell us we haven’t been in danger!”

“The danger would be about equal if you were in London.”

“You destroy all the romance. There were risings in several places at once. What do you think of that? And but for a little misunderstanding and want of concentration——”

“Fortunately, as it happens, there is always

a little want of concentration ; you may safely count on it."

Miss Barbara contested that there was danger ; but that it ill became one who bore the name of Gordon to be afraid. Had not the Gordons been foremost in every deed of valour since the Crusades ?

"They will kill the queen," said Di, from her corner, interrupting a panegyric on the clan.

Miss Piper recalled the flight of Isabella, and trembled.

Mrs. Henshaw looked up absorbed from her paper.

"How the Baird-Browns will envy us, Philippa!" she cried. "It is like living in the middle of history, you know, instead of reading musty dates. What a mercy it was, my child, you didn't go out to buy the flowers you spoke of! How can one think of new caps in times like these! They might have shot you. I shudder to think of it."

"Do I look like a dangerous conspirator?" said Philippa, arching her brows, and smiling on them all.

Then Mr. Malleson was discovered by the lady at her desk.

"Do come here, you dear good man," she said, "and tell me all you know. Are things quiet again? Are the rioters subdued? Have

the authorities prevailed, or is there more danger?" Her pen hovered eagerly over the paper.

Malleson went over to her, and did his best to satisfy her thirst for horrors. He drew an alarming picture; he was as sensational as a young reporter on his trial. The lady's fears were working. Her pen was rapidly recording his grave sentences. Miss Piper had drawn near, and was listening with bated breath.

Everybody started when the door suddenly opened. Miss Piper's hand went up to still the fluttering of her heart. The poor lady was crushed and dismayed by the severity of Miss Barbara's glances more than by all the flying rumours of disturbance.

It was only Blake, who entered with a note.

Philippa took it. "For you, mamma," she said, inquisitively examining the seal. "What an official-looking document!"

"If there is danger, it is the ambassador's duty to protect us as British subjects," said Mrs. Henshaw in a calm voice. "I know my privileges." She looked round at the company. "Philippa, do you remember how kind that delightful consul in Italy—no, in France—I forget his name, was to us?"

"Never mind him just now, mamma. Do put us out of suspense."

She broke the seal with careless dignity, while they all looked on with curious eyes. She read the communication slowly, then she let her arm drop, holding the sheet loosely in one hand. She looked round her, addressing them all.

"Of course, I know it is one's duty to disregard danger. I have always thought it a great want of breeding to show one's feelings too much—a calm restraint; and no Englishwoman can forget Brussels and Waterloo, though I always did pity the Duchess of —— dear me! I've forgotten her name. Such a sad spoiling of her ball."

"Mamma, mamma!" said Philippa impatiently, dancing up to her, "you keep us all in torture. Are we to be secretly assassinated, or put into a Black Hole, or what?" She peeped over her mother's shoulder, and glanced at the note. "Mrs. St. John!" she said wonderingly.

"I hope she doesn't mean to insult us by offering us American protection!" said Miss Barbara with indignant emphasis.

"An invitation," said Philippa, reading further. "A ball at the American minister's!" Her eyes sparkled. "Di, my child, the messenger must have taken a note upstairs for you. Isn't it splendid? Worth a dozen revolutions."

"A ball!" Miss Barbara rose with grim

looks. "This is no time for dancing, and such follies, when any moment we may be attacked in our own homes. But there's a lightness about some people you have little need to expect from their years and their grey heads. I'll be going home. There will be a card from that silly woman lying for me to answer. I'll let her know *my* opinion of such conduct, when folks would be better employed thinking seriously of their end."

Miss Piper, in spite of this gloomy view of matters, secretly hoped she might also find an invitation directed to herself, and the hope buoyed her up against Miss Barbara's depressing hints and allusions. She no longer proposed to accompany her friend, as she would formerly have done; she would almost rather have faced the rebels alone.

"There can't be any sin in a little social gathering—to keep up one's spirits?" she hinted wistfully.

"It is one's duty to go." Mrs. Henshaw gave a little sigh. "For my dear child's sake I must exert myself; and, I believe, I was never considered a coward. What a good thing we brought your pink silk, Philippa, and my lavender satin."

The talk having drifted from war and disaster into a more peaceful channel, interesting only

to feminine minds, Malleson, who had been an amused listener, rose to leave, but at a whispered word from Deonys, he crossed the room and offered to escort Miss Piper past the teeming dangers of the streets.

"Oh, thank you," she said, looking up at him with meek, grateful eyes, and clinging to his arm. "I am a little afraid; I dare say it is very silly—but not with you."

"I'll take good care of you," he said pleasantly.

She went over to kiss Di and whisper to her—

"My dear, I am not at all afraid—with him. Such a gentleman! He reminds me of my dear Robert—and so old a friend. And, you know, we can't all be Miss Barbara Gordons."

"Ralph is quite to be trusted," said Di with a smile; "and he will let me know how you got home."

As the two passed out, Major Gibbs was announced, and came in, large, well-preserved, and important, giving Miss Piper one finger to shake in passing, and honouring Ralph with a nod.

"I met that young fellow Chester just now," he said. "Wants to see some of the fun, he says. Poor fun, I tell him!"

"Oh, he's all right," said Malleson carelessly. "He'll look after himself."

"I came to protect the ladies," the major answered. "Women are always afraid. Call this a revolution—after India!" He stalked in with a contemptuous wave of the hand. He adjusted the glass in his eye, and while he was delivering his greeting, he spied out the note that had caused such a flutter in the breasts of all present.

"Ah, Mrs. St. John," he said. "Got mine last night—always secures me early. Fine woman that. Of course, you will go, ladies?"

"We thought of it, as an example, to show we are not afraid."

"And even if we don't enjoy ourselves, we shall be supported by a strong sense of duty," said Philippa, with dancing eyes.

"Of course you will go. They manage things very well at the Legation, but nothing to *us*, you know—nothing to *us*. Must get you introduced to our chief and his lady."

"It might be useful in case of danger," said Mrs. Henshaw, still thinking of the protection that was her due as a British subject.

"And in case of balls," said Philippa smiling.

"I'll manage it. You trust to me," said the major loftily. "Nothing to be afraid of—nothing at all. Lady Louisa a particular friend of mine. I'll arrange it."

"And you will take us under your care?" said Philippa demurely. "You see, Major Gibbs, we are not used to such great people, and we might bow at the wrong place, or——"

"Philippa," her mother protested, "with your education and advantages——"

But the major was bowing gallantly.

"I'll take care of you ; never fear. Nothing to be alarmed at. I'll coach you. I'll see you safe through it. Bless you, they are my dearest friends ; there's nothing they wouldn't do for *me !*"

CHAPTER VI.

“Less of sentiment than sense had Katie.”

At this time in far-off England the dull November sky brooded sullen and revengeful over London.

It was raining, and the wind was high; the anger of the heavens was poured out on the patient and unresisting earth, and men's hearts were heavy within them. Perhaps in no quarter did the day seem more dreary than in the western suburb of Kensington, where the whirl and dance of the passive leaves, and the shrill whistle of the wind, that shook the few still clinging to the naked branches, emphasized the gloom. Kensington pays dear for its summer beauty by its autumn sadness.

In a house that looked remotely and with a sidelong glance into the Gardens, a lady sat at work. The drawing-room window commanded a group of tossing trees, swayed this way and that at the will of the wind, yielding reluctantly at every blast a last sere and rustling dole.

The lady, who was thin and elderly, and who was dressed with a certain neat and sprightly care, looked up now and again to shake her head and give a little sigh. The sigh was for Paris, the paradise of all Madame Lavoisier's dreams—Paris, where alone you can be always gay. Madame Lavoisier was a Scotchwoman by birth and French only by marriage. Yet she persuaded herself that the land of your adoption is your true Fatherland; the mere accident of having been born elsewhere ought not to be reckoned against you.

"I am French," she was wont to say, with true Gallic animation. "French to the tips of my fingers." They were long fingers, swift and neat, fingers that pleaded for her. "But for you, my child, would I linger in this climate—atrocious, farouche, barbaric!"

Miss Bell Fullarton, to whom this was addressed received this praise of France with a certain coldness. Madame Lavoisier had been her governess, and was now her companion and guardian, and she loved her well, but she did not love her love of Paris.

"You are a bad patriot," she would say severely, "the Scotch and the French have always been allies—a proud thing for France!—but as for Scotland, there is no country like it under the sun, and there are no people like

Scotch people. You must learn to love your country."

This fiercely loyal young person presently joined the lady, whose thoughts were lingering about the capital made beautiful by Baron Haussman and the third Napoleon. That was the Paris to live in, but even the Paris of the Commune would be better than no Paris.

Miss Bell wore a waterproof, buttoned closely and a small hat that suggested deerstalking and Highland moors. The face under the hat was comely, though the cheekbones were perhaps a trifle high for beauty; the upper lip too long (the young lady gloried in these evidences of her nationality), but the eyes were blue and straightforward, the mouth and chin firm, and the hair of that pale reddish gold that would redeem the plainest features.

"I am going out to walk," she said; "will you come?"

"I, my child!" Madame Lavoisier shivered. "It would kill me; and you—you will wet your feet."

"Wet my feet here—*here*," said Bell with scorn, glancing at her neat and serviceable boots, "where it does not even know how to rain properly! If I were going to cross Kilmure Moor you might talk—there would be some credit to be got out of one's boots, but here!"

"Here is bad enough, I think. If it were Paris, now—one has the best of everything in Paris. The sun shines there."

"And does it never rain there, and snow there, and does the east wind never blow there? I remember the last time——"

"Ah, the last time! Bell, you will not say anything against that beautiful, perfect time!"

Miss Bell's fair face flushed very slightly, the faintest access of colour under the little hat, and then she frowned.

"Oh, you silly woman!" she said. "If you want to be reminded of your Paris, go out to the High Street, and look at the shops. There is frivolity for you."

"Ah! the shops." Madame shook her head softly. "When I go it is but to pity the poor people, those who buy and those who sell; they have no sense of beauty or grace, these poor English, it is all solid, good, heavy."

"There I am at one with you," said Bell, buttoning her glove with neat dexterity; "only I'm not sure about the solidity or the goodness. I think, for my part, it's mostly sham. English people are so superficial, they never do anything thoroughly."

She said this with great severity. It was a favourite grievance. Madame Lavoisier had listened to it often, and with her French love

of the light handling of every topic, she a little dreaded it.

"About you going out alone," she remarked, by way of diversion; "it is a thing that troubles me. English misses do not go out walking alone."

"I am not an English miss," Bell answered with great scorn. "I am grateful to have been born in a country where one may retain a little independence. As for you going out with me, you know very well it is all nonsense. You never meant to do it."

"But for the atrocious climate——" Madame took another glance at the tossing trees.


"It's a poor little climate, only half in earnest, like everything else here," said Bell, her eyes following the same direction. "Think of the Kylmure Moor, with two or three feet of snow on it. The first big flakes fell there in the middle of October, and here, in the end of November, they lose heart before they get half way from the sky, and turn into this miserable mist."

Madame Lavoisier did think of Kylmure, and drew a little nearer the fire.

"Good-bye, you dreadful salamander," said Bell, marching to the door; "I'm going out to face these weak little elements, and you are going to roast yourself and dream of Paris."

Madame Lavoisier fell back into the chair, and certainly did as she was bid. She had a great hospitality for every memory of that gay centre of the world. She thought in French. She spoke the language with commendable purity, and, naturally, she thought in it with yet greater ease. She had taught Bell to have a certain fluency in her favourite tongue. She had been able, for instance, to take her share in the conversation during that last memorable flight across the channel, when they had had the benefit of Monsieur Adolphe's guidance; but Bell spoke French with a hopelessly acute Scotch accent. Madame sighed over this very often. It seemed to point to failure, to neglect on her part. Nothing would remedy it but a lengthened stay in the capital, and the benefit of constant conversation in the purest Parisian. When madame's mind reached this point, she always thought of a certain M. Adolphe, a youthful cousin of her late husband—a young man, bright-eyed, pigeon-breasted, with a carefully waxed moustache, and the finest manners and the best heart in the world.

Bell certainly wasted no thoughts on this Parisian exquisite as she went with firm, rapid step towards Hammersmith. She had a great many more important things to do. She had, for instance, the whole of England, or, at least,



the whole of London, to reform and reorganize; and that was mission enough, surely, for the most zealous apostle. Everything she saw was wrong, and she burned to set it in order. She had an immense appetite for helpfulness. Naturally her attention was first given to the girls of her own age: she had made a great study of English girls, and she had weighed them and found them wanting. The few whom she met went hurrying through the storm, pale-faced and shivering, struggling weakly to hold up umbrellas, and to gather the folds of flimsy waterproofs over their flounces, blown about as helplessly as the whirling leaves.

Bell, her cheeks glowing, the raindrops shining on her bright hair, her step free and elastic, despising the wind as a very feeble enemy indeed, looked at them with a great deal of lofty compassion.

"They sit poking over the fire reading, or rather skimming over novels—I never knew an English girl who *read* a book—no wonder their cheeks are white! They are as afraid of cold as if it were a wild animal about to devour them; they seem to dread that they will melt under the merest shower." This was something of what she told herself. She longed to take each one she met by the arm and to say to her,

"Come and walk with me to Kew Gardens; it's not much of a walk, but it's all one can manage in this poor, flat country of yours. I'll engage to send you home with an appetite for dinner. You won't stuff yourself at the pastry-cooks, and declare that the sight of roast beef makes you ill after that."

"If there were any sensible people to join in it, I would get up a dress society," she went on with her soliloquy. "Nobody should be allowed to wear any boots but McMurdoch's; he has some idea of following the line of the foot, and doesn't pinch your toes into a shapeless mass. And we should get all the homespun for dresses manufactured for ourselves. But first one would need to remake the people." She shook her head. "That would be a harder task than to remodel their gowns."

As she went on, leaving Hammersmith, its narrow streets, bridges, crowded houses behind, she saw many other things that gave her food for adverse criticism.

If the boots of the girls displeased her by their texture and shape, the inadequately clothed feet of the little children of the poorer orders called forth much disapproval. Bell considered these shabby shoes and stockings a sinful waste of money, as well as a lasting injustice to the wearers. She thought of the bare limbs and

uncovered heads of her small Highland compatriots with proud superiority. Whoever heard of a Highland child taking cold or falling into consumption, she wondered, with sublime indifference to statistics.

Dwelling on the subject in this light, she suddenly remembered Miss Amelia Townsend. This young lady lived on the outskirts of Hammersmith, and had lately written two notes to Bell, to announce that she had a bad cold, and to describe her symptoms and sensations with some minuteness. Bell, it is to be confessed, read these effusions with a trifle of contempt—this anxious analysis of their sufferings was one of the little failings of her English sisters for which she found but scant sympathy; yet the next day she had walked across half London to find some particular remedy in which she had faith, and had sent it to Miss Townsend with characteristic instructions. Now she determined to go and see whether her patient had proved obedient.

Bell's face wore a decided "I told you so" look when she found Miss Townsend stretched on a sofa before a large fire, curtains and doors all carefully closed, and an array of little medicine bottles on a table near her.

"How good of you to come and see me." The invalid held out a languid hand.

"How are you?"

"Not well—far from well." She began to give an account of her sensations.

Bell walked round the end of the sofa and inspected the bottles, reading the labels gravely.

"See how hard it is to cure me," said Miss Townsend, watching her.

"To kill you, I should say."

"Your stuff is there, too, Bell; but I haven't got so far yet. And I got your note, too," she smiled.

"I might as well not have written it, I see," said Bell gravely, ending her survey and taking up her station as far as possible from the fire.

"Oh, Bell, dear, but I couldn't go out and walk, you know, in such weather, and with the doctor telling me I must take such care."

"I believe that doctor must have a great weight on his conscience," said Bell impressively, "if he has any conscience left. He is saying what he thinks you will like best."

"He says I have a very delicate constitution," said Miss Townsend, unwilling to part with this interesting possession. "And really, dear, don't you think he ought to know best?"

"Oh, I could tell you that, too," said Bell calmly. "If he had told you you were doing your best to have no constitution at all, he would only have been speaking the truth."

"And yet you urge me to go out!

"It would make even me delicate to live here," said Bell, unfastening her waterproof. "I feel tired already in this atmosphere; and, as for you, the life is just oozing out of you."

"Oh, I am not really very ill," said the invalid, hardly caring to follow her symptoms quite so far; "only needing a little care."

"I'll tell you what you need. You want a cold plunge bath every morning, and a six-mile walk after it, and no more late hours or dancing in hot rooms and eating indigestible suppers. I'll undertake to cure you and give you a new constitution in six weeks."

"Ah! but I am not a Spartan like you. You must give me up, Bell; you must confine your hopes to your own countrywomen, unless they are all as brave as you."

"I don't think I'm particularly brave."

"You are afraid of nothing."

"I don't know. I haven't tried everything yet. I dare say I might be a coward in some matters."

"Not brave to come out all this way, on a day like this?"

"That needs no courage; it's pleasure. What I should need courage for would be to endure your life for a day."

Miss Townsend laughed.

"I'm afraid we couldn't exchange places. I'm sorry I'm such a disappointment to you, Bell. Haven't you any Scotch friends or cousins—you are all cousins, aren't you?—to sympathize with you?"

"I have only one cousin, and she is half Spanish. I don't know very much about her, but I dare say she has been brought up in a very silly way."

"That is comforting. I think I should like that cousin of yours."

"I have never seen her. Amelia, I must go. I do you no good, and I am dreadfully uncomfortable in this hot room."

"Yes, go. You remind me of a wild bird shut up in a cage, Bell. I wish I had your strength and, though you won't let me say it, your boldness. But I am content with my cage. I'll send you a little note to tell you how I feel, to-morrow."

"If you would send me a note to say you would walk over to lunch, I should like that much better. I should take care that there was nothing to disagree with you."

"The cure would be worse than the disease," said Miss Townsend, laughing. "Bell, my dear, you must give me up; I am hopelessly English."

"I know. You can't help it, I suppose."

"I'm afraid not. I advise you to adopt the Spanish cousin," Miss Townsend retorted as Bell said good-bye.

She took her departure with the greater speed because she had received a new inspiration, and when this energetic young lady became possessed of an idea, she was immediately impatient to examine it alone.

On her way home, criticism was content to remain dormant. If there were young persons who were rash enough to clothe their feet in flimsy kid, Bell had no eyes for them. The children with shoes and stockings passed unchallenged; the thriftless and the shiftless Southern ways for once escaped rebuke. She was reckoning with herself instead. She had a lively and workable conscientiousness, and was as prompt to exact any duty of herself as she was to insist on its fulfilment by others. And she had become aware of a neglected duty.

The storm had increased in force, but she never felt it. She walked with a free, resolute step and upright carriage, her head erect, her blue eyes absent and thoughtful, rather than keenly observant as usual. There was a certain charm, for those who had power to see it, in this independent, erect, almost defiant figure—this girl, who was taking herself to task with almost laughable earnestness.

"Amelia Townsend was quite right," she was assailing herself; "I had no business to go and lecture her, when all the time I have been neglecting my nearest obligation. That poor child is my only cousin, and what have I ever tried to do for her? Nothing but write to her twice a year."

The ghosts of those old letters seemed to rise in the misty, rain-washed road, and to reproach her. Bell remembered vagrant sentences from them here and there, and she was ashamed to remember them. She might have made them so much more sensible and urgent and impressive. She thought of all the sentiments with which she might have overwhelmed and dismayed poor Di, and she was angry with herself.

When she reached home she walked straight to the drawing-room, where, soothed by the gathering darkness and her dreams of France, Madame Lavoisier had fallen into a gentle slumber. She started as the door was briskly opened, and instinctively put up her hand to arrange the lace upon her head.

"Bell, my child, it is you? Are you drowned—half dead?"

"I am very well," said Bell, kneeling down on the fender-stool, and lifting up a fresh, rosy cheek to be kissed. She did not care much for kissing, but madame did; and Bell liked to

indulge people's fancies, except in the matter of clothing and food and the general conduct of life. "You ought to have been out. Don't you know it is very bad for you to sleep in the day?"

She lifted the great, ornamental, shining poker as she spoke, and broke the lumps of coal into fragments. She never used the serviceable little "curate," on the principle of not encouraging shams. The vexation of the housemaid's soul was not to be taken into account where a great principle was concerned.

The flames leaped up, and showed a very earnest young face, the raindrops still sparkling on the bright hair.

"I have an idea," said Bell, addressing herself to the red glow.

"Ah!" said madame, clasping her hands dramatically, "you are going to leave this dreadful, barbarous England; you are going to listen to my prayers."

"I have thought of that, too," she answered, with a demure smile. "I have sometimes thought that we might give up the house——"

"And go to Paris!" Madame's action became lively.

"The winters in Kylmure are glorious! It's a pity to lose them all. I long to see real, clean, respectable snow again."

Her companion sank back with an expressive shiver.

"But in the meantime," Bell continued, "we can do nothing. We have this house till spring. I have been thinking a great deal this afternoon about my cousin, Deonys Ouvry."

"You would go to Spain?" Madame began to revive a little.

Once away from this dreary England, and all things were possible. Visions of M. Adolphe and the sunny boulevards floated before her eyes.

"No," said Bell, shattering this dream ruthlessly, "I shall ask her to come here. She is my only cousin; I have neglected her shamefully. I hope she is not silly, like her name; but, whatever she is, I ought to do something for her. I dare say she has never had any one to tell her things, living alone with my uncle. She has had a great deal against her. I should like very much to do something for her."

There was a great deal of kindness in the blue eyes, and her heart was warming towards the young cousin for whom so much might be done.

"Fortunately, there has been no such great loss of time," she went on, as she met with no interruption. "She is a mere child, I believe—a child, that is, to me. No doubt she will consider me very old."

"A charming woman is never old," said madame, not quite certain how much she liked this plan, and meeting it with a general remark.

"That's a very pretty compliment," said Bell, with a laugh; "but it doesn't take away a single day from my twenty-six years. But you know I don't like to be thought young. It would be much nicer if Deonys would look on me as a grown-up friend; I could do her more good."

"And you think she will come?"

Madame privately wondered whether the young stranger would show much alacrity in accepting the invitation. To be done good to is not what one thinks of first when one is eighteen.

"I hope so," said Bell soberly. "I will write to her very urgently. And we must be very kind to her. I have a fancy that she is gentle and a little, just a very little, silly, perhaps; but she is young," said this person of exalted age; "and I do want to be very fond of her."

"You will write to her?"

"Oh, yes; at once. It is only a week or two before my usual time. I dare say she won't be able to come before spring; but I'll write and get the thing settled at once."

"But you will take off this first?" said

madame, with her fine smile, touching the wet cloak with a dainty finger.

Bell started up.

“To be sure! I’m breaking one of my own rules. Never mind; you know I never catch cold.”

CHAPTER VII.


“ Her gown should be of goodliness, well ribbon'd with
renown ;
Purfill'd with pleasure in ilk place, furrit with fine
fashioun.”

THE letter was duly written, and went upon its way, and in course of time fell into Di's hands. She received it with very mingled feelings. Letters from England were rare. Her father had long ceased to have any connection with that country, and Di's one correspondent had never given her any particular pleasure.

Her cousin's tone, though kind, had always made her feel as if she were very ignorant and unambitious, and quite absurdly contented with her surroundings. This time the half yearly missive had come before it was due, and Di felt that it was hardly fair to make her uncomfortable a whole month too soon. Then it flung the burden of debt upon her shoulders, and the answering of Bell's letters was, as she had confided to Felix, a task that had no comfort in it.

So it has to be confessed that she examined the address, written with neat preciseness, and the various postmarks, and contented herself for the moment with that inspection. She slipped the envelope unopened into her pocket till a less busy hour.

For she was living in stirring times. There was, for one thing, Mrs. St. John's ball at the American Legation, about which everybody was talking. Deonys had duly received a card for herself. It was the first invitation of the kind she had ever received, and she looked at it curiously. She was rather proud of it. It triumphantly proved that she was grown up; it was as good as a certificate of age, and was very soothing after Bell's uncomfortable way of pointing out how young she was. But she never for a moment meant to accept it. She disliked and mistrusted Mrs. St. John, and she felt it would be a sort of treason to partake of her hospitality, and to pretend to be grateful for it. Besides, the thought of a ball had more of terror than of fascination for her. She had never learnt to dance; it would be melancholy to sit still; but it would be more than melancholy to attempt and to fail. Then she would have to talk French. She knew that people of many nationalities attended these assemblies, and that all the pretty things and all the polite things



were uttered by these very refined people in the court language of the world. She had, besides, no dress; she could not go in a white frock, that had grown too short at the sleeves. So, on all these very important grounds, she made up her mind to decline.

"What am I to say, padre?" she asked, showing her father the dainty card when he came to her in the evening. "It is my very first invitation, and I want to refuse it in the finest and most correct words. It feels very grand to say no."

"But why should you say no?" he asked, examining the card with some intentness.

"Oh, I meant only for myself; here's another for you. I've got to do my refusing on my own account. That makes it very responsible."

"But why refuse at all?" said her father again. "As for me, such things are not much in my way; but you—you are just at the age for pleasures."

"I'm too young," said Di, laughing, "or too old. I think I must have missed over the bit of me that was meant for balls. I don't want to go, padre."

"You can't tell how you will like it till you try."

"I don't think I want to try."

"Ah! youth, youth!" said Mr. Ouvry, with a

melancholy smile, "don't be in haste to relinquish your legitimate pleasures, my child. Age will come and hard experiences all too soon."

"Let me stay at home with you," said Deonys, to whom this vapouring, sentimental fashion of speech was always sacred, touching her quickly by its hint at past sorrows. "Let me stay at home with you, dear old padre."

Mr. Ouvry put an arm round her waist, and let her lean her head on his shoulder; but he allowed himself to look rather vaguely out of the window.

"Do you know what everybody will say, Di? They will say that I am the stern father so commonly represented in fiction, and you the unfortunate princess, whom I have confined in a tower. It is always a tower, I think."

"It doesn't matter what people say," said Di, who disliked to rule her actions on this principle, "so long as it isn't true, and it is all nonsense."

"And there are other grounds," he continued gently. "We must not be selfish; we must not think only of ourselves; we must sacrifice ourselves sometimes, if it is to give pleasure to others."

"Do you think the St. Johns want us so much?"

"They have paid you the compliment of asking you."

"Of course, I know they want you," she said, speaking from sincere conviction; "but me?"

"Suppose I should want you?"

"You can have me at home always."

She did not mean to reproach him, as he knew very well; but her gentle opposition stimulated him to carry his point. He had not cared much about it before; but to disagree with this bland gentleman was never the way to gain your end. He began to think again that Deonys was a little selfish.

"I don't ask many things of you. I am not very exacting, I think," he said mildly, "not perhaps altogether the fierce father of novels we were talking of a moment ago—eh, Di? and it grieves me, my child, to see you thinking only of your own pleasure."

"Of course, I will go if you wish it," she answered quickly. She was a little shocked to be again charged with selfishness.

"I do wish it, my dear."

"Then it is settled." She drew herself a trifle away, and looked at him. "But you will find me a dreadful trouble. Going to balls is like being married; you never have anything to put on. One would think you had gone without clothes all your life before."

"So you do know something about balls?"

Where did you gather all this ripe experience?" He smiled at her with mild indulgence.

"Oh, I know. You will have to give me a dress, padre, and slippers and gloves, and I don't know all what."

"And we shall be ruined, eh? Well, well, that can be managed, too, I dare say—that little matter of a toilet. And we must choose something of the best, something very good indeed. You will get your friend to help you."

"Oh, yes, Philippa will help me," she answered. She had perfect confidence in Philippa's taste in costume; but very little in her own power to wear her finery successfully.

"The emancipated princess must look like a princess. You are growing up, Di; you are no longer a child."

"No; and if you make me go to balls, you will find that I am very grown-up indeed! If I come out of my shell, I'll never be able to go back—never; and I'll cost a great deal more."

He did not heed her playful words; he was looking at her with some intentness. She seemed to have suddenly sprang up into womanhood before his eyes, into slender and graceful maidenhood. He remembered Mrs. Henshaw's words, he had remembered them throughout all this discussion; they had to a certain degree influenced him. A month ago he would have

said that Di was a child. She might then have refused a dozen invitations with his entire approbation, but now it seemed to him she was no longer the little girl he had chosen to think her; she was growing womanly, and her face, with its serene, clear eyes, was very fair. Mrs. Henshaw had hinted that Di was pretty, but her father knew that she was a great deal more than that. He did not want the lady's offered help; he did not want to lose his daughter—at present. He was very fond of her. But he could imagine a time when she should have to relinquish this early youth and charm, and when he himself might possibly have developed a few more likings and desires. One could never tell what might happen. In the meantime, it seemed a pity to stand aloof and to let all the prizes fall into the lap of another.

Of all these vague, half-formed thoughts he said not a word aloud, but he continued to look at his daughter closely and with growing content.

"You are like me—like what I used to be as a young man," he said suddenly.

"Am I?" She looked surprised. She was about to have said, "I thought I was like mamma, only not pretty," but she checked herself.

"It is very nice of you to say that, padre, but I don't think I have a neat straight nose

like you, mine curls up a little at the end ; it is a nose of good intentions, it begins well, but it fails half way."

She was thinking all the while, "It's a good thing I don't add to his trouble by reminding him of mamma."

He laughed a little, and kissed her lightly on the forehead.

"Wait till you see the waking princess," he said. He, too, was thinking, "she is not like her mother," and the thought gave him great satisfaction.

So the difficult question of the ball was settled ; and, as usual, it had been found possible to count safely on Di's sweet temper. She did not like the prospect of ending her chrysalis stage and turning into a gay butterfly, but she had given her promise, and there was an end of it.

She presently discovered that she was to have a great many companions. Mrs. Henshaw had declared it to be a sacred obligation to go—to show that, as a British subject, you were above the paltry fears that agitated the breasts of others—and she hoped she was equal to whatever was expected of her. Miss Barbara, who pronounced it no time for fooling when you might be robbed at any moment of your family plate or your life, announced, to everybody's sur-

prise, that she meant to be present to look after Deonys.

"I knew her mother," she said majestically, to all who cared to listen. "I would expect to be haunted by her ghost if I didn't do my duty by that child as if she was my own. I never was the one to shrink from what's right, and, though my *moire's* not just the newest fashion, I'd like to know if that's to hinder me sheltering a poor motherless bairn, when she goes into temptation!"

Di smiled, but she thanked her old friend. She was not afraid of Miss Barbara's large *moire antique* presence being any restraint on her, as Philippa hinted; she thought of it rather as a comfortable shield and defence.

The two girls drew together in renewed friendship over this great prospect. It was a relief to have some new ground to stand upon, some neutral meeting-point where past differences might be lost sight of. In matters of taste Philippa reigned supreme, and it was pretty to witness her eager anxiety that Deonys should outshine everybody else, and beam forth a veritable princess.

Mr. Ouvry had been indulgent in the matter of a cheque, and shopping became the absorbing occupation of the day.

Felix found no one but Mrs. Henshaw at

home when he called. He was a little absent in his manner at this time, and listened with a divided mind to the lady's talk, though it seemed to him afterwards that she had said a great deal, and had been more than ordinarily confidential. Formerly, he had extracted much private fun out of her little collection of sentiments, but now his feeling for her was more a kind of pity. He took infinite pains to be kind and courteous, but he was amused no longer; and she, though she talked with great seeming frankness, was never quite at her ease with this changed and silent young man. He knew too much; strive as she might, she could never forget that, and there were hours when she almost hated him for it.

She mentioned that Philippa had gone out shopping with Miss Ouvry, and even named the street where they were probably to be found, but Felix did not go in search of them; he went instead for a walk. He took at this time long solitary stretches across the bare country, on foot or on horseback, "in search of backgrounds," as he told Ralph, who professed surprise at this new freak.

So, while he was walking with steady, swinging steps towards Caravanchel, the two girls were left in undisturbed possession of the counter at the shop of the Blue Dahlia. This affair of

choosing was a very serious one, and never more serious than in Spain, where the Eastern habit of bargaining lingers. Di conducted the enterprise with much skill; Philippa chose the stuffs to be examined, but she held the purse-strings. The young man behind the counter found occasion for much dramatic action, shrugging of the shoulders, beating of the breast, cries that the señoras were about to ruin him. He addressed them orientally and familiarly as "my daughters;" he relinquished a peseta with a gesture of profound melancholy; he patted, praised, and caressed his wares as if no price could be too large for such splendid fabrics. And through it all Di sat with that air of knowing all about it, and of biding her moment that was truly diplomatic.

There was, for some time before the girls were aware of it, an amused spectator of this little scene.

Ralph Malleson had also been calling at the Preciados. He had sat for half an hour in the gilded salon, and had been more inclined than Felix to gather information.

Philippa was the first to discover him. She looked up and shook her head at him.

"We don't want you," she said softly; "we are engaged on an agitating affair. It needs the greatest prudence."

"So I see."

"You will spoil everything. I know what it is to go shopping with gentlemen: you have no tact, and you lose patience at once."

"I will be a model of patience—a male version of Griseldis," he said, coming forward. He leaned against the counter and looked on with amused eyes.

Di, glancing up, welcomed him with a pleased look; and the youth on the other side of the board, seeing this new ally join himself to the forces of the enemy, grew more dramatic, more despairing than before.

"It is very Eastern," said Philippa. "What mamma would call a page out of the past."

"Fight it out, Di," said Ralph encouragingly. "Don't give in."

"I mean to give him what is right," she answered, "the full price, but not twice what he ought to have."

"I'm afraid that insinuating youth would have found me an easy prey. Just look at him. One would think we were about to deprive him of his life as well as of all his property."

"That's the finishing stroke," said Malleeson, glancing carelessly at the melancholy salesman, "the last act of the drama. Now the curtain will fall. They like to do things picturesquely here."

And he was right, for the next moment this melodramatic owner of the Blue Dahlia was cheerfully measuring off the yards, and folding up the parcel, with as much alacrity as if he had been the victor.

"So this is the raiment in which you are going forth to conquer," Ralph said, fingering the diaphanous stuff. "What do you call it—muslin?"

"Oh, how wise you are," said Philippa lightly. "Do you suppose we should have wasted all this anxiety over muslin?"

"I thought white muslin was the proper armour for young ladies bent on slaughter. I could give you a dozen instances from the best fiction, beginning with Thackeray, of heroines who wore it."

"Perhaps you would like us to wear pinafores and bibs and blue sashes, too? This, sir, if I may correct you, is silk gauze."

"The stuff that butterflies are made of? Di, suppose you do a little bargaining for me, now?"

"But this is only a lady's shop."

"It is a lady I want to choose for. An aunt, let us say."

"But you have no aunt."

"Well, then, you most literal young woman, a lady who might be my aunt; or, suppose we

say, my grown-up sister. Now, what would any one, who had the honour of occupying that position, choose for herself, do you think?"

"We are to suppose her older than you?" Philippa asked.

"You are to suppose her a discreet and charming lady, with a great sympathy for my youth and immaturity."

"She must be very grown-up, indeed," said Di demurely.

"It means that she is elderly, not to say old," said Philippa thoughtfully; "though he puts it so politely. It must be something solid, then, and massive."

"Something of the very best."

"Is it a ball-dress?"

"A ball-dress, yes."

But Di, who had taken no part in the discussion at all, here asked the shopkeeper to bring forward some shining silks and satins, and was turning them over with very bright eyes and a happy smile.

"Wouldn't one of these do?" she said, looking up at him questioningly.

She pointed out a silvery grey and a deep, full-toned blue.

"The grey would be best; but she might like a little more colour. I am sure she likes bright things."

"How well you comprehend this mysterious lady's wishes, Di!" exclaimed Philippa.

"She has known me all her life, you see, and she understands the family taste," Ralph answered, looking at Di, with a smiling glance of secret understanding.

"Let it be the blue, by all means, if you think my—she would prefer it. You must add to your kindness by fixing on the quantity and the trimming, and all the rest of it."

"But one must know if she is tall or little. It makes a great difference."

"Oh, I can guess, I think," said Di joyfully. "I am so glad. I think this is the very nicest shopping I ever did."

It is needless to say that Ralph Malleson also thought it a very pleasant way of spending the afternoon, pleasanter, for instance, than instructing the British public, which ought to have been his task. He was in a royally generous mood, and would have been quite reckless but for Di's grave and almost motherly watchfulness. Yet, before they came out of that shop, they had made some most wonderful purchases; and the owner of the Blue Dahlia had changed his demeanour from pining melancholy to the most smiling joy. There was a head-dress with roses of the pale, faint pink that goes so well with grey hair; there were slippers, and a collar, and

even a laced handkerchief, and a bottle of delicate perfume. Nothing was forgotten, and this large package was paid for, and was ordered to be sent to the Preciados, where it was to be once more repacked, readdressed in a feigned hand, and sent on its further way by a porter, who was to be bribed to the most profound silence.

Di entered into all these details with glee.

"I am so glad," she said again; "and she will never guess who sends them."

"She must never guess. You must be very wily, and parry all her questions."

"Oh, she won't ask many; she is so simple. She will be content with wondering and being grateful."

"What a good nephew—I beg your pardon—brother you are," said Philippa. "Brothers generally like to take full credit for their good deeds, but you do yours in secret."

"Philippa, you mustn't betray him."

"I couldn't; I haven't the pleasure of knowing Mr. Malleson's—sister. But you won't forbid me to look for that blue gown and those pink roses at the ball?"

"Oh, you will know all about it before then. I want you to help me a great deal. But you mustn't whisper a single word of it to anybody."

"I will be as silent as the grave, as mamma would say. Wild horses won't drag it from me. I love mysteries."

This was a very innocent little mystery, Malleson thought, as he left them at their door, and yet he smiled to himself more than once as he thought of it. It was a well-spent hour, since it had brought such a light of happiness to the sweetest face in the world. It is to be feared he valued Di's pleasure more highly than that of the lady who was to be made rich by his gift.

If Philippa had failed to penetrate the small secret—which is improbable, seeing she was an acute young person—she was very speedily enlightened. Di waited two days in a state of pleasant impatience, and then she summoned her friend. A fluttering little note, full of exclamation points and dashes and underlined words, had come from Miss Piper.

"We must go to her. You will come, won't you? And you won't tell her, if you can help it, Philippa?"

"I'll go, and I will be a model of discretion."

"We mustn't say what isn't true," said Di, ever a stickler for uprightness. "But it won't be difficult to make her understand that she mustn't ask any questions."

"She will suppose she owes this gift to the generous impulse of a Piper. There are still Pipers left, are there not, or are they all done into miniatures?"

"I don't know."

"Perhaps she is the last of her clan, like Miss Barbara. What shall we do in that case?"

"We must keep the secret somehow, Philippa——" She hesitated. "Do you think you could help to make the dress? You have such clever fingers, and she can't afford to have it made."

"But if she insists on a low body," she answered, with a rueful arching of her brows, "like the thin Miss Piper, with the small waist!"

"You know she won't."

"I'm not sure. Young people like to be smart."

"It would be a way of showing——" Di began gravely.

"Of showing I was sorry I got her into trouble—that I wished to make amends?" said Philippa quickly, with a little flush. "Oh, Di, you don't think I meant to hurt her? I'll make the dress with the greatest pleasure in the world."

"That will please her. Miss Barbara has never forgiven her."

"I'll make her do it yet."

Philippa stopped in the wide entrance, and, laying her hands on the other's shoulders, looked down earnestly and yet brightly.

"I can make people do what I like—generally."

"I know you can," said Di wistfully.

"Well, Miss Barbara shall make her peace with Miss Piper. Would that please you?"

"Very much. It is such a great thing to Miss Piper."

"Then I will make her do it. And now, don't you think you might kiss me, Di? Do you know, you haven't kissed me since—for a long time, and I have felt like a naughty child put in the corner."

Deonys put her arms up and drew the other face down to her own. In the mute caress there was an unspoken reconciliation, a tacit promise that the past should be forgotten.

Miss Piper, as Philippa had shrewdly guessed, did not discompose them with any perplexing conjectures. In the agitating hours since the parcel arrived, she had established a complete theory, and it was not for these young people to disturb it. She drew them in and shut the door with an air of mystery.

"A great thing has happened," she said, speaking in an eager undertone. "I sent for


you to tell you about it, Deonys. I have been recognized by my relatives."

"I am very glad," said Di, wondering at this beginning, but understanding that congratulations were expected of her.

"I may mention now," said the little lady, sighing softly, "that I felt their desertion. When dear Robert died, a little notice would have been very soothing. One expects it of one's relatives at a time like that. But my cousin was a poor man then, and he might have dreaded to presume. He was the first of the Pipers to go into trade, and perhaps he feared to intrude."

"And you have heard from him?"

"Not directly, my dear. He has taken a most delicate way, I must say, of recalling himself to me. Poor mamma would never consent to any advances on our part after Richard took to business, and I am afraid she would have been shocked at his boldness in coming forward again. She would have repulsed him; she was so dignified." She glanced doubtfully at the large lady represented in the painting. "But I have no dignity, I fear. Besides, he is my only cousin; and I believe that there is not the same objection now to trade that there was in mamma's day. I understand people in business are admitted into the most refined circles."



"Oh yes," said Philippa encouragingly. "You find them everywhere, even at court. Business is in fashion just now."

"Then you think I may accept his gift?" Miss Piper turned eagerly to Deonys. "He has sent me a most handsome present, and I may say, a most timely one. He is—ahem!—a silk merchant, so there is really something very delicate, you know, in the attention. But I want to do what is right." She glanced with longing eyes at the parcels spread out on the table for inspection. "And if it would not be dignified——" She faltered.

"Dear Miss Piper," said Di earnestly, "you mustn't think of refusing it. The person who sent it meant it in all kindness and respect."

"You think it would hurt his feelings if I sent it back?"

"I can answer for it—it would," said Philippa, with dancing eyes. "He would feel dreadfully hurt."

"You think so? I dare say if dear mamma were living now she would think differently. One cannot hold out against the spirit of the age. I could never have accepted a present from any other person, but a cousin is different."

"I am sure it was sent out of the kindest motives," Di murmured again, in a great hurry to get the question settled.

"The worst of it is, I don't know his address. It came anonymously. That is what I call real refinement of feeling, but it makes it more difficult to thank him."

"The giver will not care to be thanked. He will understand."

"But that would be discourteous," said Miss Piper in gentle reproof. "I dare say if I write to London it will find him. I have no doubt the Pipers are still remembered there; we had an excellent position once."

She sighed a little over the ended past, but she brightened the next moment, for Philippa had untied the ribbon that held the satin together, and its lustrous folds fell sweeping to the floor.

"You will be magnificent!" she exclaimed. "There won't be a dress to equal this in the ball-room. I must say your—cousin has shown a charming taste." She looked across at Di with a mischievous smile.

"Blue was always said to be my colour." The little spinster beamed gently on them. "It was considerate of Richard to remember that. And this is not too gay. One should never be too gay."

"Oh, it is just right; it will look splendid. As for Miss Barbara's *moire*, it will be just nowhere," said Philippa, with a little toss of her pretty head.

"Miss Barbara will think it frivolous," said Miss Piper, once more a prey to doubt.

"Ah! but we can't all hope to please Miss Barbara." Philippa lifted her chin. "And why should we make frights of ourselves to keep her company?"

"She will say I have been too yielding. She would have repulsed poor Richard. She has so much firmness."

"I shouldn't repulse anybody who sent me a dress like this. As for Miss Barbara, you mustn't mind her; you know it is all my fault that she is cross," she said penitently, looking up into the old, kind face. She was kneeling on the floor, holding the long shining folds against Miss Piper's shabby skirts.

"Never mind, my dear." Miss Piper's tone was anxiously consoling. "She will forgive me some day, perhaps. I may have been imprudent, but you, at least, are safe. You sent him away?"

"Yes," said Philippa, in a low voice. "I sent him away, or he went away. At any rate, he is gone."

No one spoke for a moment, but in all three minds the thought of Felix, and the share he had taken in accelerating Mr. Ferryman's departure, was uppermost; but that was a subject Philippa preferred to ignore. She was the first to break the silence, saying impulsively—

"If I was less—if I behaved less badly than I might have done, I have to thank you and Di for that."

Thus she sealed her atonement, and the next moment, with one of her quick changes, she was gaily discoursing on the subtleties of a toilet.

"You must let Di and me make the dress for you," she said. "We are two idle young women; it will be a charity to employ us. I've seen all Mrs. St. John's finery from Paris, and am steeped in the very latest fashions."

"I should like it nicely made." Miss Piper forgot her scruples under the spell of the topic. "It would only be right and just to my cousin Richard to have it well made."

"It's the very least you can do for Mr. Richard," said Philippa, with excellent gravity.

"What is your opinion, Deonys?"

"I think you may trust Philippa," Di answered, with a smile; "she is a born dress-maker."

"If I could be sure of being well fitted—not that I think lightly of your powers, my dear," she hastened to add; "but I am perhaps a little particular. I may not have the mind of my family—to that I do not pretend—but I may say I have the bodily presence." She patted her neat waist, and smoothed her shabby skirts with a little gentle pride. "The Pipers

always had a charming taste in dress, as any one can see. Dear mamma was quite famous for her turbans, and my aunt Anne once had some lines addressed to her by a poet. They were called 'Stanzas on a Lady in a Red Satin Gown.' She had an elegant figure, and she always wore a low bodice."

To see the skill with which Philippa steered clear of these too fascinating examples, and the daring way in which she snipped and pinned and turned about the costly stuff, was a wonderful thing.

These were happy days that followed. Di forgot her fears—her little anxious tremors. Her doubts were slumbering. She abandoned herself to the passing hour. Life was once more very fair; it seemed to go by in tripping steps and to the sound of music.

Philippa and she sat together in the high window overlooking the hurrying fever of the life below, like two cloistered maidens peeping at an untried world. Philippa sung snatches of gay song while her fingers flew; but Di was often idle, looking at the passing pageant with sweet, serious eyes. It was December now, and the year was waning, but here in the south it dies royally, wearing to the end its splendour of sunshine and of brave blue skies.

CHAPTER VIII.

"This bud of love by summer's ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower."

ON Christmas Day the great ceremony of a presentation at the British Embassy took place.

Major Gibbs had not been allowed to forget his proposal; and the arrangement of this delicate little business had afforded him a lively satisfaction. To guide, advise and instruct a pretty young lady and her equally handsome mother, was a pleasant occupation for a gallant gentleman who knew himself to be welcome, and for whom that slight refreshment already mentioned was always forthcoming. Philippa poured out the wine in the tall glasses, and listened to the almost paternal warnings with an air of the prettiest deference.

"It is so kind of you to help us," she said; "we might have made so many mistakes; and I suppose Lady Louisa is like the queen—she would not pardon mistakes?"

"You have nothing to fear, my dear young lady. Rely on me; I've prepared her ladyship. I've told her all about you, you know," the major answered reassuringly.

"How nice of you! Then she won't have anything to find out about us."

"Really, Philippa, one would think you had never met with people of distinction in your life," said Mrs. Henshaw, irritated at this too great simplicity; "and I have always striven that you should mix only with the best society."

"But this is such a very serious affair, mamma; a slip would be fatal. We must be on our very best behaviour; and how can I know what the etiquette of an embassy is? We never got higher than a consulate before. And if Major Gibbs will only keep us right——"

She looked at him with a smile, in which he read nothing of the fun that was lurking there. She was in good spirits again; she could take enjoyment out of very little things.

And so, after morning service in the chapel, the ladies were swept up the wide staircase by this impetuous military gentleman; Deonys, whom Philippa insisted should be of the party, came last. Through wide corridors they went where gilded lackeys stood looking at themselves furtively in the tall mirrors, and so into

the great audience chamber, where Lady Louisa held a sort of royal court. She was a plump, fair lady, with a pleasant smile and a gracious bearing, and she sat with her bonnet on, having just preceded them from the chapel.

"And that made it seem so homely and friendly, you know," Mrs. Henshaw afterwards explained. Indeed, there was nothing formidable in the visit, which was very brief, though Philippa found that her vivacity was somewhat thrown away on the Hon. Mr. Berry, who, if the truth must be told, looked preoccupied and a trifle bored.

A few smiles and guarded words from Lady Louisa, a growl or two from the ambassador, much pompous speech from the major, sweeping curtsies and exit the ladies.

"That is what I call a most affable woman," said Mrs. Henshaw confidentially, when they had received Major Gibbs's congratulations and had taken leave of him. "No pretence about her. She asked me your age, Philippa, and if you had come out."

"Mr. Berry didn't take such a friendly interest in me. He looked as if he thought I ought to have stayed in."

"Oh! since we are right with his lady it matters very little, though I dare say you were mistaken, child. I've known people with that

dry manner who did the oddest and most impulsive things; and you know it is she who will issue all the invitations."

"Unless he has an impulse to exclude us."

"I think I know when I make a good impression," said Mrs. Henshaw with loftiness of tone. "I take some trouble to please. I wish I could be always equally sure of your behaviour."

Di, who had said nothing at all, and who had made her curtsy but awkwardly she feared, was glad when they reached the Plaza Major, where a great fair was being held, and thus cut short this exchange of repartee.

There, wandering disconsolately among the lambs and kids and the too inquisitive turkeys, Felix was discovered and taken possession of.

"You ought to have been with us," said Philippa; "we have received our hall-mark, our patent of nobility."

"Where have you been?"

"At the Embassy. Lady Louisa is charming. She asked if I had come out. I hope you told her that I had made my *début*, mamma?"

"You may trust me to take care of your interests, Philippa," said her mamma in a stately voice. "It is a pity you did not go with us, Mr. Chester; if we had only thought of mentioning it to Major Gibbs——"

"Thanks; I've met Lady Louisa," he said carelessly. "I know some of her people at home."

"If we had known sooner we could have told her about you."

Mrs. Henshaw felt aggrieved. It would have been such a good subject of conversation; but this careless young man seemed to think Lady Louisa's no better than common people.

"Then you have called?" said Philippa. "She will put you on her list. I wish she would put me on it, too; I behaved beautifully. I deserve to be rewarded."

"I haven't called. I suppose I must, some day."

"If she asks you, won't you say I dance beautifully? It might occur to Mr. Berry that I had never been taught."

"If she asks me, yes." He smiled at her mischievous face.

They had lingered while they talked in a corner a little removed from the crowd, but now there was a sudden rush of people towards them, and they were separated. Felix found himself standing near Deonys, who had taken refuge behind one of the stalls.

"It is the procession of the Niño," she said, when her glance met his. "It will be gone in a minute."

"I don't care how long it takes," he said boldly, not manifesting any interest in the spectacle.

"But you ought to look at it."

"Ought I?" he laughed. Well, if it's a duty——"

He stood on tiptoe; but he could see nothing, save the shaven ivory crowns of the bareheaded Brotherhood, and he soon followed her to her shelter.

"They are taking food to make a feast for the poor people in the hospital. Can't you see the dishes they are carrying? It's something you ought not to miss."

"No," he answered, not making any very vigorous attempt. "I see nothing but some yellow pates. I'll imagine it."

"If you would push through the crowd you could see it," she said anxiously.

"It's very snug in here, don't you think?" said Felix composedly. "And we are doing a deed of charity; we are keeping shop for the absent owner."

"Here he comes. The procession has moved on. We had better go."

"No; please stay half a second. I'm bound to buy something after taking possession in this cool manner. Won't you help me?"

He glanced at the contents of the little booth—

coarse lace and yellow embroidery, gingerbread and turrón—a mixture of honey and almonds—of every quality, aristocratic and plebeian.

“Do you like that sticky stuff?” he said doubtfully.

“No, not much; I’ve outgrown that taste,” she said, laughing.

“Well, this is rather desperate, isn’t it?” he said, with comical ruefulness. “Why don’t they have things a fellow can buy? I’ve an old aunt at home who goes in for laces—the more tattered and the yellower the better. But that looks suspiciously new.”

“Oh, you mustn’t buy that for her. It’s only cotton.”

“I suppose she would disown me? Well, I can’t take her a cake of gingerbread, and she is past the age for confectionary. With the best will in the world, I can’t be a dutiful nephew, it would seem.”

But, as he spoke, his glance lit on what proved to be a treasure. It was a small ring, which lay among some worthless glass trinkets—a little finger ring, of battered and discoloured silver; but it had signs of being a genuine relic; perhaps dating from the time of the Moorish occupation. Felix examined it curiously, and then he made out that it had a device of clasped hands. It might have been

a pledge of love's constancy in some old-forgotten days.

"I'll buy this," he said suddenly, laying down the price demanded without a murmur, to the unfeigned surprise of the dealer, who had counted on an excited passage of bargaining.

"You have paid far too much for it," said Di quietly. "Don't you know, Spaniards always ask twice what they expect to get?"

"Very likely; but you see I wanted it."

"Will your aunt like it?" she asked, looking at the trinket without admiration.

"Oh, my aunt"—he began to laugh—"she's an old lady, you know. But she has pretty hands, and she wears a lot of sparkling rings—diamonds and sapphires."

"Then I shouldn't think she would care for that one."

"Very likely not. She wouldn't appreciate its antiquity, you think? Well, perhaps we may see something else that will please her better."

He spoke carelessly. Still he seemed to prize the ancient hoop of silver, which he placed for safety on his smallest finger. He had certainly paid a great deal for it.

There were at this fair many things that were pleasant and enlivening, a great deal of colour and sound, a brightness and a gaiety

that were very infectious. Felix strolled about well content at his companion's side, following the course determined for them by the moving throng. He was in no hurry, seemingly, to rejoin the lost members of the party. Di looked about her diligently, but she could see them nowhere.

"Don't you think we had better wait for them?" she asked.

"Oh no," he answered carelessly; "they'll be sure to turn up immediately. It's never a good plan to look for people in a crowd. You may chase each other all day, whereas, if you take no trouble, you are certain to meet."

But it is a very strange fact that whenever Felix, who was tall, caught the most distant glimpse of a certain waving purple feather, he immediately saw something in the opposite direction that arrested his attention.

The centre of the wide space was filled with a motley crowd of peasants from every quarter of the peninsula. Here an Andalusian—a trim figure in tight black jacket, crimson sash, and trousers of a wonderful stripe, a bit of a dandy in the careful arrangement of his plaited pigtail; there a La Manchán, with high jack-boots of untanned leather; or a Murcian, bare and bronzed of limb, and with sandalled feet. Again, it was a Valencian who outshone all the others

in the gorgeousness of his raiment, and who had the air of a theatrical brigand, because, above his full white sleeves and finely embroidered waistcoat, there rose a face that was tragic almost to laughableness in its stern and majestic gloom.

Where could a young man find a better opportunity of studying "backgrounds," and other things, than here?

Felix made good use of his opportunities. His thirst for information was great. He invented a pretext for halting at every stall, apparently for nothing in the world but to ask his companion questions, or to pass the most irreverent remarks on the time-honoured national costumes.

"Look at that miserable imitation of a kilt," he said, pointing to the owner of a pair of short trousers, that stood out like a full shirt. "Oh, I forgot, you have never seen a kilt."

"No; my cousin Bell says it is the only sensible costume, and that every man ought to wear it."

"Even the pale-faced Saxons? Will she not receive me unless I appear in the garb of old Gaul?"

"I should think she isn't so silly. Is the Highland dress really like that?"


"Well, they don't go in for so much lawn in

the north; and it is rather the exception than the rule to go about with a bandaged head, unless, perhaps, after a fair."

"He hasn't hurt himself," said Di, laughing; "that handkerchief is instead of a cap. Look! they all wear it tightly knotted like that."

Then Felix professed a great desire to inspect this curious and brilliant head-dress a little nearer, and drew her round to the other side of the square so fast that one might almost have said he had a wilier purpose in view. And there they found a stall, at which nothing was sold but flowers—rare blossoms from the balmy south. Felix immediately proposed to buy some. He took a long time to choose. He would have nothing but the most perfect blooms, and the most spotless and glossy leaves; and there was a great deal of laughter over his blundering attempts to explain himself to the buxom Andalusian who sold them, and who wore a rose coquettishly placed behind her ear.

Felix thought this a charming fashion, and was telling Di so, while in the same breath he begged her to take care of the flowers for him. What had he to do with flowers? They would be wasted in his room in the hotel, which he never entered all day long; and, besides, how could he arrange them? A man's fingers were



not for dainty operations like that. He held out his broad palm in derision. Miss Ouvry really must relieve him of them; he had noticed a vase of hers at home.

In the middle of all this expenditure of eloquence over a trifle—since why should she not take the flowers?—the crowd parted, and the lost ladies appeared.

“Here you are at last,” said Mrs. Henshaw, in a voice that was not perfectly sweet. “We have been looking for you everywhere, everywhere, and the people so rude!”

“Do you think so?” said Felix innocently. “I was just comparing them favourably a minute ago with our holiday-makers at home. I think it’s a very fine sight.”

“You have not shared my anxiety, I am afraid,” she replied, with a touch of asperity. To be jostled and pushed about is not good for the temper, and it did not add to her amiability to find that she had not even been missed. “I thought of all sorts of dreadful things. Mr. Malleson was very much surprised not to find you with us, Miss Ouvry; but, as I tell him, if young ladies choose to be so independent——”

“Oh, is Ralph here?” Di interrupted, immediately beginning to scan the crowd in search of him.

“He deserted us, too, when he didn’t find

you," said Philippa. "Oh, what lovely flowers, Di! Have you been buying anything?"

"Nothing at all. Mr. Chester bought a little ring; but we saw nothing else worth having."

"Oh, do let us see it!" She turned to him. "I saw nothing in the way of jewellery except rosaries, if that can be called jewellery."

He drew the little hoop silently, and perhaps reluctantly, from his finger, and handed it to her.

"It is very quaint." She looked at it curiously.

Her left hand was bare, and she thoughtlessly slipped it on to one of her fingers.

"It is too large," she said carelessly. "You must have it cleaned before you wear it."

"Its dimness is one of its great charms," said Felix, coming a little nearer to look at it. "See how much worn it is. A new silver ring would have no value at all."

At that moment Mrs. Henshaw, who had also been looking for Mr. Malleson, turned her glance upon her daughter.

"What have you got there, Philippa?" she said, putting up her eye-glass. "Did Mr. Chester buy that for you? How kind of him!"

"No," said Philippa hastily, drawing the ring off and handing it back.

He looked at her for an instant gravely.

"Pray keep it," he said. "It is of no value; but it is quaint, as you say, and I think genuinely old."

"It was not intended for me," she said a little proudly; "it was mamma's mistake."

"I am afraid you are very ungracious," said her mother easily. "Look at Miss Ouvry; she did not make any scruple about her flowers, and such very pretty flowers, too."

Deonys glanced down at her bouquet, and flushed slowly.

"Yes," said Felix lightly, "that's what I'll call you, if you refuse to accept it; it will be very ungracious of you. Have you forgotten that this is Christmas Day? It has evidently done duty as a token of friendship before now, if you will consider it in that light again——"

Here Ralph Malleson came up, and, in his greeting, the other words that Felix may have said were lost to Di. He had called the little trinket a token of friendship—not the finer, more sacred word, he had said to himself, when he looked at the clasped hands fashioned long ago to seal some dead lover's ardent vows. Did Philippa notice this, too? Di never knew on what terms she had accepted the gift, but she wore it constantly, in spite of it being too large for her slender third finger.

Mrs. Henshaw's greeting to Ralph was warm, almost effusive.

"You see, we have found this naughty, truant girl," she said. "I give her into your hands; you must take charge of her. She is really beyond my control. My own child is enough for me. Young people are so wilful and so independent nowadays."

"I will take care of her," said Ralph sedately, drawing her arm through his own; "she won't escape me."

He took her a few paces apart.

"What have you been doing to get into disgrace?" he asked, looking at her with mock solemnity. "This is a fine character to get of you, Miss Di!"

"The crowd separated us from the others; everybody was running to see the procession," she said, looking up at him with more gravity than the occasion seemed to warrant.

"I dare say the crowd will be obliging enough to do it again," he made answer. "Here is a loophole of escape. Don't you want to get away from all this now?"

"Oh yes, Ralph, if you don't mind taking me, I'd like to go. Unless you would rather stay a little longer?"

"Well, I've seen all this before, you know, and I haven't Felix's robust interest in specta-

cular shows. I rather think that young man imagines all this has been got up for his benefit. He will take as much interest in it as if he had been paid for the entire performance."

"I suppose so," she answered absently; but in her own mind she was just a little doubtful of Mr. Chester's absolute enjoyment; she had seen a look on his face but a moment ago that did not betoken entire cheerfulness. That sudden gravity of his expression when he looked at Philippa puzzled her. Did it mean this, or that? It might mean so many things; but, then, it might also mean nothing at all. And the ring? That it was a gift for his aunt was a little fiction in which she was not so foolish as to believe; but had he meant it for Philippa, or—for some one else? All these were questions which it was manifestly impossible she could answer, so she wisely determined to spend no more conjecture on the matter, but to enjoy the pleasure of the hour with her friend. It was like old times to walk again with Ralph, good kind Ralph, who was so comfortable a companion, content to talk or to be silent, and not exacting in the matter of replies.

So they went and took a look at the holiday gathering in the Prado, and listened to the music.

"I dare say Philippa is wishing she was with

us," said Di; "but if I had asked her to come, I'd have been snubbed again." She looked at him mischievously.

"I couldn't undertake the responsibility of looking after two young ladies," said Ralph gravely. "One independent and self-willed young woman is quite enough; and I have noticed that it requires both her mother and Felix to keep Miss Philippa in order. I shouldn't have said Felix was good at that sort of thing, should you? But Mrs. Henshaw seems to have great faith in his powers."

"Take me down to the river," said Di, with an air of command; "and don't spoil our holiday by saying disagreeable things."

So they forthwith strolled to the banks of the Manzanares, and lingered near a certain little house, from which there issued sounds of happy laughter, and of children's voices full of glee.

Presently, they were rewarded for their patience by seeing that royal lady, Doña Victoria, who had herself come to superintend the feast she had ordered for her special *protégés*—the children of the washerwomen; and the sight of this gentle queen's sweet face always touched one young girl with feelings of great loyalty and affection.

That, perhaps, was the happiest hour of this unusual holiday. In the evening, they were all

to dine at the Hôtel de Paris. Felix had been very eager about this, and would take no refusal. He had asked everybody, and had engaged the largest private room, and made vast and elaborate preparations.

The little English colony was largely represented. Major Gibbs was there, pompous and congratulatory ; and even Mrs. St. John and her busy husband had been included.

Di dressed for this feast without much anticipation of enjoyment. She wore a dark plain dress without any ornament, its severity unrelieved even by one of the flowers which she had put carefully in water.

Her fingers had hovered lovingly about the roses, as she arranged them in her little vases ; but some of their sweetness had vanished from these rare winter blossoms, since they had been chosen for her. There had been a look in a certain lady's eyes, and a word spoken by her, that had made Di say to herself—

“ No, I shall not wear you ; not one of you.”

She looked very young, almost childish in her scanty dress, and that made it seem quite natural that she should sit very silent during the evening, and take no large share in the talk. The dinner was a very grand affair indeed, and Felix made an admirable host. Mrs. Henshaw sat near him, and talked a great deal ; they had

spent the afternoon together, and had many little recollections in common. A young nephew of Mrs. St. John's fell to Philippa's share, and her ripple of laughter hardly ever ceased. Di privately considered Washington Bean rather a tiresome and stupid boy, and wondered what amusement Philippa could extract out of his small witticisms; but Philippa had the happy gift of amusing herself under the most adverse circumstances. It was Di's first experience of a ceremonious dinner-party, and she took a great interest in all the proceedings. She thought her father much the handsomest man in the room, and she listened with the honestest admiration to his refined remarks; but she was not sorry to take shelter behind Miss Barbara's large presence when they retired to the drawing-room, and to spend herself in comforting Miss Piper, who was a little neglected by the other ladies, and was still under the ban of Miss Barbara's displeasure.

Malleson was not present. He had declined on the score of having to make up for an idle day. He had made his deliberate choice between that hour of Di's undivided companionship and this larger gathering of all his countrymen, where he could not hope to secure her for himself.

"It's my belief he's elaborating a private

scheme for the redemption of this unfortunate country," said Felix, explaining his absence. "It seems to me an immense waste of time. If you could get the different parties to combine there might be a chance, but you might as well expect water and fire to agree; 'they don't combine, they only conspire.'"

"Then you don't take much interest in politics?" said Mr. St. John, himself a keen diplomatist.

Felix shook his head.

"The question is too hopelessly intricate and too vast for an outsider to grasp. I can't pretend to unravel it. I confess I care nothing at all for anything in Spain, but what it has to offer in the way of amusement, and politics I don't include under that head."

"Bull-fights and cock-fights?" suggested Mr. Washington Bean. "There was a *funcion* in the cock-circus last Sunday."

"You didn't go?" Philippa asked.

"Well, ah, no," said the boy, "I happened to have something else to do, you know."

"I don't count these among my amusements any more than you do, Bean," said Felix, who understood the lad, and knew him to be not quite the finished man of the world he wished to appear.

"You may find your amusement cut off pretty

smartly one of these days," said the American dryly. "We are on the brink of a revolution, sir."

"Unless one were to find that amusing, too?"

"Amusing! it's disgusting," thundered the major. "The country isn't fit for a gentleman to live in."

"Rodriguez was in great form to-day," said Mr. Ouvry, and thereupon the talk drifted to the topics of the hour, and a great many wonderful opinions were hazarded, maintained, contradicted, disputed, reaffirmed. Through it all, Mrs. Henshaw comforted herself with the certainty of British protection, and shook her head over the frail chances of those ladies who had not been honoured with an introduction to the English chief.

Felix hardly exchanged a word all evening with the companion of his morning's ramble; but he was often near her, and she found all her little wants carefully anticipated. On his part, he had an indescribable sense of comfort and well-being whenever he glanced—and his glances were frequent—at a certain corner, where a young girl dressed in black was holding herself a little aloof, looking out on the gay company with candid, serious eyes.

With all these distractions it was, perhaps,

no great wonder that Bell's letter should have been forgotten.

Deonys suddenly remembered it one morning, a few days later, and reproached herself keenly for her neglect. She read it with great bewilderment, and an uncomfortable sinking of heart. This scheme of visiting England seemed all at once to lose its long anticipated charm, now that it lay with her to carry it out. Bell's letter was very earnest, her arguments strong; she was, perhaps, a trifle more dogmatic than usual. Di did not say this to herself; she only assured herself that she did not want to accept the invitation; she found nothing persuasive in her cousin's words. However, she had little time to entertain her dislike, for there was another plan afoot for that day.

Mrs. Henshaw, secure in the possession of Lady Louisa Berry's goodwill, had conceived the bold project of paying a visit to the Escorial. The daring of this scheme existed chiefly in the lady's imagination. There had been rumours of a Carlist approach from without, rumours of disaffection among the troops within the city. No one, who had any experience, put much faith in this renewed cry of "Wolf, wolf!" but Mrs. Henshaw had no experience, and she was fired with a desire to prove that a Briton knows no fear.

"What is the use of being English if you do not exercise your rights?" she asked, though wherein lay her superior claim to invade the monastery was not apparent. "It is necessary to show that we are not afraid," she said to her daughter.

"If it were a nunnery!" cried Philippa. "I have a wholesome fear of nuns; but monks are delightful."

In spite of her courage, however, the matron was not uncareful to secure the escort of the gentlemen. Mr. Ouvry excused himself with gracefully expressed regret: "A little engagement—a trifling matter of business, which, unfortunately, claimed his attention." It is well-known to everybody that in January the Escorial is like a cellar. Mr. Malleson, less ceremonious, gave a vague promise of possibly joining them in the course of the afternoon. Felix alone was found willing to be of the party from the first.

It was cold, as Mr. Ouvry had privately predicted, and there was a great sadness and gloom about the colossal gridiron. You have there an impression of vast dreariness, of confining walls that rise everywhere about you—of an intolerable silence. The silvery sierras, lifted abruptly in the background, add to this feeling of imprisonment. Against them the great convent,

with its curiously precise lines of white and black, stands out in cold prominence. It is, as Felix called it, a stupendous harmony in grey.

There were light drifts of snow from the spurs of the Guadarramas, borne along by a wind that cut like a knife. The gloom of Philip's dark and intolerant spirit seemed to brood everywhere, and to rest like a curse on the barren and frozen earth. It is all Philip II. You forget the successors to his name, and the empresses and queens who also rest in the gorgeous Pantheon of Kings; even the great Charles is not remembered. After three centuries it is still Philip who is the haunting spirit of San Lorenzo.

To Mrs. Henshaw this gloomy monarch, heir to the largest kingdom in the world, was but a dim and shadowy figure, with no clear place in her slender store of dates. She had been brought up in the comfortable mistakes of a past generation. She believed in Clarence's butt of Malmsey; Henry VIII. was to her the original of Bluebeard; Tell's apple an indisputable fact. These and other picturesque legends were the strongest points in her historical armour. Thus, though she knew little about the great founder, she was prepared to be impressed by such signs of his presence as still exist. There is the mean little cell—where this lord of half the world

died—furnished after the fashion of a garret; like the blood on the steps at Holyrood, and the block at the Tower, on no account to be missed.

Mrs. Henshaw could not tear herself away from it. The Goya tapestry was nothing to it, one could see tapestry every day. She sat down on one rickety chair after another; she peeped through the little slide that opens to the church; Philippa's attention was claimed at every moment; Felix, too, was asked a great many questions which, to tell the truth, that young gentleman, in spite of his university career, found it not easy to answer.

Deonys slipped away at last, leaving them in charge of the custodian, who spoke a broken jargon he called English. Philippa would fain have followed her, but this was not permitted. Her mamma was shocked at her want of interest, at the slight advantage she took of this great opportunity of instruction.

"As for me, I cannot acquire enough. To learn something; to add to one's store every day, that is such an excellent rule."

In her zeal for information she attached herself to the guide, and begged Mr. Chester to look after Philippa.

"She is so wilful, and she may run away and lose herself," she remarked playfully.

"It isn't a catacomb," said Philippa, smiling, "though it is almost as cheerful."

Felix obeyed with a good grace, though he looked a little longingly at the door out of which Di had fled.

She knew the monastery well, and it had for her a certain charm; but on this day its silence and austerity froze the blood in her veins. She strolled into the garden, a prim and Dutch-like arrangement of fountains, clipped myrtles, and straight white paths, with a wide beyond of bare and rugged plain.

Here Ralph Malleson, who knew her tastes, joined her.

"Playing truant again!" he said. "Why aren't you improving the shining hour, Miss Di?"

"Oh, I don't know. I got tired of it," she answered.

"What a lack of enthusiasm! How sadly indifferent young people are nowadays!" he said, with fine gravity.

"Don't,"—she shook her head at him—"I've just escaped from all that. There were too many of us; one ought not to come here in a crowd; and besides, I hate chatter," she added energetically.

"Does that mean that I am to go away?" he asked, with great civility.

"No, of course not. Oh, Ralph, I'm glad you have come. Something has happened."

"Something is always happening now," he said dismally. "Has Mr. Ferryman turned up again?"

"Oh no! But this is very serious—for me."

"Well?" he questioned.

They were standing on a broad terrace. He did not turn to look at her, but his mind touched swiftly on a great many possibilities.

"Well?" he repeated, a little impatiently.

"I have had a letter from my cousin Bell—an invitation to go to England, and the father says I ought to accept it."

"Is that all?" he said, with the lightness of relief. "I thought you were going to give me a disagreeable shock."

"I think it is disagreeable enough for me."

"I thought you would have welcomed a chance of widening your horizon—isn't that the phrase? I have a dim recollection of a young lady who was anxious not so very long ago to try the strength of her wings."

"One changes one's mind sometimes," she said, with dignity; then she relapsed into her former tone. "It is so far away," she said dolefully; "and to go for months away from everybody, all alone."

"I'll go with you, and look after you."

He spoke with utmost carelessness; but he had a sense of quickened pulses, of a sudden hope.

"Oh, if you could,"—she looked at him with frank pleasure in her eyes—"how good that would be! But, of course, it can't be managed; there is your work."

"There is my work; but I might play truant, like you."

"The father says I am to go with Mrs. Henshaw in spring. But I don't want to go with her. I love Philippa, but Mrs. Henshaw——"

"Well, I don't love her either," said Ralph, so gravely that they both laughed.

"It isn't only that. One can get on with people without caring much for them, but she makes me so uncomfortable. Ralph," she said impulsively, "why does she speak so about mamma? What can she know about her? She has no right to say such things to me. They are not true!"

He looked at her in unfeigned surprise.

"Your mother? What things——" He began; but she gave a little wave of her hand, as if to enforce silence.

For, down the broad alley, between the trim and stiff myrtles, came the lady in question. Philippa and her companion were behind. Mrs.

Henshaw walked a little in front with the guide, who was pouring out disjointed fragments of information, to which she listened with an air of deriving much benefit.

CHAPTER IX.

“Knightly guests and courtly pageantries.”

MALLESON had no further opportunity on that occasion to ask the meaning of Di's words, of the trouble in her eyes. Mrs. Henshaw had decided to remain all night at the inn, that she might the better satisfy her thirst for information. Malleson represented that the accommodation was barbarous, the food uneatable, and the charges extortionate, all of which only helped to strengthen the lady's determination.

“It would be wrong—wicked to neglect so great an opportunity,” she said, with her serious air. “As for these young people, it is an education. I must not deprive them, at whatever inconvenience to myself, of a chance of increasing their little store of knowledge. If there is danger, we can face it,” she added, with a noble simplicity.

“I wish my education had always been conducted on this principle,” said Philippa. “My

namesake's gridiron is a much pleasanter school than the old French convent in the Rue Blanc."

"Were you educated in a convent?"

"There and other places." She turned to Felix. "Sometimes a convent, sometimes a pension with mamma. One can learn a good deal in a pension, you know; and we have a liberal acquaintance with most of the better known ones."

"I have striven to place my daughter in the way of the best European culture. I have sacrificed myself to her; but she has had great opportunities—more than I ever had, I am sure, at Miss Black's, in Brighton, though she was an excellent creature, and so expensive."

"And now, I am being finished off with a course of sight-seeing," said Philippa gravely. "You see, it is necessary for us to spend the night at the Miranda. We have not seen the relics."

"Well, whoever remains, I, at least, must go," said Ralph. They were all standing on the broad terrace, and the guide was waiting respectfully for his fee. "Di, you will come with me?"

She assented eagerly; but was immediately overruled by her hostess.

"Not at all, my dear," she said graciously. "You must not desert us; you must be my

cicerone, and tell me all you know. We shall go off by ourselves, and see everything comfortably. I must say you are an excellent guide. As for Philippa, naughty child, one cannot count on her as a companion."

"You forget, mamma, I have my education to complete. I have not had Di's chances."

"How is it to be, then?" said Malleson, a trifle impatiently. "I must be off. Is any one coming?"

"I will stay with the ladies, of course," said Felix, speaking for the first time, having apparently only made up his mind, in spite of that "of course." "I don't pretend to be much of a protection, still——"

"You will be very useful—to apply strong language to mine host of the inn," said Philippa.

"And you, Di?" Ralph turned to the young girl at his side.

"If Mrs. Henshaw wishes it, I'll stay," she said quietly.

"I wish it even more than mamma, Di."


"Well, then, good-bye," said Malleson, cutting short his farewells, and striding hastily down the long alley.

He went off somewhat provoked with Di, if the truth must be told. He thought she ought to have gone with him. He did not understand her hesitation; he would not, perhaps, have

understood it even if she had explained its source.

Already she had half-repented her impulsive words. She felt a quick compunction for that hastily-spoken confidence; it seemed petty and mean in the face of the lady's renewed kindness. Besides, she wanted, above all things, to be loyal to Philippa; and if by staying she could help her—— Her glance wandered to the young man and the maiden walking a pace or two in front, while she came behind, Mrs. Henshaw's arm confidentially linked in her own, Mrs. Henshaw's voice in her ear. Her eyes were very grave as she looked, but they were full of the most honest kindness.

Ralph could hardly have entered into these subtle motives; perhaps in his man's way of looking at broad facts alone he would not have sympathized with them. He pondered a great deal over her indignant little protest. It seemed to him a horrible thing that one woman could be thus cruel to another. It justified him in his early dislike of Mrs. Henshaw. What could she have to say against the dead woman, saintly and sweet as the young girl herself, he felt sure. Could jealousy outlast all these years, and burn over this long-forgotten grave? All his old doubts revived. He felt that there was something hidden, something it might be well



for him to know, if only to shield Di from this petty spite. If it was settled that she should pay that visit to England, he made up his mind that, at whatever cost to himself, he would arrange to be there at the same time. He was her guardian—he had got into the way of calling himself that, perhaps because he feared to use a more intimate word—and who had a better right to look after her?

It happened that at this time he was more than usually busy, and he did not see his English friends again for some days. Even Felix seemed to avoid him, though that idler's absence was hardly to be regretted when one was at work. Had anything happened during that extended visit to the Escorial, and had Felix made use of the opportunities so liberally given him?

Once, when he was hurrying out on business, he met Philippa. The street was a narrow one, and a knot of idlers, that quickly spread into a crowd, had gathered across it, as people gathered in those days on any shadow of a pretext. One voice was raised in dispute, and was greeted with angry shrugs and murmurs. Philippa stood on the edge of the pavement, having just come out of a shop. She hesitated, in doubt which way to turn, and grew frightened under the bold looks of admiration that were cast at her.

Malleson went to her at once.

"You ought not to be out alone," he said.
"What can your mother be thinking of?"

"We wanted something that was forgotten for to-night, and Blake could not be spared," she explained. "We can't pass, Mr. Malleson; look how the people have gathered."

"Here, give me your hand. Now follow me, and don't look to the right or to the left. Shut your eyes and your ears, if you can."

"Oh, thank you!" she exclaimed, when his broad shoulders had made a path for her. "What should I have done if I had not met you?"

"You would have gone back the other way, I suppose," he said dryly. "And I think, in future, Miss Henshaw, you had better have some one with you when you walk out. Spanish compliments are not famed for delicacy, and even a lady who is used to much admiration might find them embarrassing."

"You think I like to have people look at me as—as these students did just now," she said bitterly. "You think I am gratified by their impertinent notice, and that——"

"Pardon me," he said, "I have not presumed to think on the matter at all."

"What a snub!"

She laughed, and tried her best to recover

from her vexation, and when she spoke again it was to say, quite pleasantly—

“I promise you I won't lay myself open to anything so horrible again; but mamma's cap hadn't come, and everything must give way to ball finery. You are going to-night?”

“I am not vain enough to suppose any one will miss me if I stay away.”

“We shall—Di and I. Do come.”

“To swell the train of your admirers? Won't Felix do instead of me? He understands the duties of a cavalier much better than I do. You have taught him a great deal, but I am past teaching.”

“I?” she said, looking at him doubtfully and flushing deeply.

Then she turned her head away. Her pride was in arms. She would not ask him what he meant, how much he knew. The next moment, with one of her quick changes, she looked at him again, and said, almost humbly—

“It is you who have been his best teacher, and Di's, too. I never knew before how much I had missed till I had seen Di. If you would take me for a pupil——”

“You do me too much honour,” he said, in his mocking way. He saw in this faltering speech nothing but a coquettish attempt to bring him back to a long lost allegiance.

himself that she could not do without even his poor measure of admiration and homage; but in this he wronged her. He did not know, never did know, how ardently this proud girl wished to stand well in his esteem.

"How could a poor recluse like me presume to instruct a finished lady of the world?" he went on in the same tone. "Here we are at your own door, Miss Henshaw. And the next time you want to go shopping, I'd advise you to borrow Blake, or, if you prefer it, I'll lend you Anchel."

"You would rather spare him than go yourself," she retorted. "Do you know how often you have snubbed me this afternoon?"

"Then it had better be Anchel, for, though he will very likely snub you—he keeps me in order—you will have the advantage of not understanding him."

"Good-bye." She turned away. Why was he always so bitter in his speech with her?

He was about to move away, but he caught at that instant some flash of aggrieved shame, some hint of real feeling, to which his better nature answered. He could be harsh to no one who was in earnest.

"What can I do for you?" he said gently.

"If I knew what you wished——" she faltered.

"My wishes are nothing," he answered quickly, though he felt sure he understood her. It seemed to him as if he held Felix's fate in his hands; as if, in her softer mood, a word from him might change the current of two lives. Yet all he said was—

"Be true. I can tell you nothing else than that. Put the truth first, and follow it. Be brave enough to face it; it will be your surest friend."

"The truth? Ah! it is easy for you," she said; and, without another word, she left him.

He had forgotten all about the ball, but he made up his mind on the spot that he would present himself for an hour at Mrs. St. John's reception. His dress-coat was of an ancient cut, and much less comfortable than the old velvet jacket sacred to his den; his ball-room manners sat on him with hardly greater ease; but when there is a young girl, who is one's idea of all that is sweet and gracious in womanhood, to claim one's services, what sacrifice would be counted too great? The meeting with Philippa had only served to point a contrast, and to turn his thoughts to her friend. And had not Di said—

"Ralph, you will be a good boy, and come to please me?"

The long-anticipated moment, which had

caused such a flutter of expectation in the breasts of all the ladies, had at last arrived. The two girls, with whom we are chiefly concerned, were dressed and waiting Mrs. Henshaw's summons. Di had descended one flight of the stairs, and was with Philippa in the gilded salon. There was a smouldering fire of charcoal in the grate, and she stood looking down rather absently at the dull glow. Philippa hovered about her, putting last light touches to her toilet, and fastening the drooping roses in her hair. All her care seemed to be that her friend should look well.

"Now, come," she said, and led Di, faintly resisting, to a long glass at the other end of the room.

Di looked at herself with great wonder growing in her eyes. This slender damsel, with the soft white draperies touched here and there with the flush of deep red roses, was a revelation to her. She stared at the reflected image with gravest glances.

"The padre was right," she said at last. "I am quite grown up."

Philippa was kneeling at her feet, critically arranging a fold of the shining gauze. She glanced up and laughed.

"You don't want to go back to the nursery, do you?"

"I don't know," said Di, with a soft sigh. "It is nice to be young."

"But it is also nice to go to one's first ball, and to wear a new dress, and to look charming."

"Do you think I look nice?" Her tone was anxious. "I think I do—a little. But I don't know myself. It's like being introduced to a new self."

"Well, don't you like the new self?"

"I'm not sure that I know how to behave," said Di, shaking her head at the fine young lady in the glass.

"Oh, that comes by instinct. You can't miss it; it is in the very air of the ball-room."

"If there were French tenses in the air it would be more useful. Stand up beside me, Philippa."

The other face that the mirror reflected was beautiful and brilliant, and at this moment it was soft with great kindness and generosity.

"You are so tall!" cried Di.

"If one were seeking a situation as parlour-maid it might be an advantage," said Philippa, with her quick, dimpling smile; "or, if one were always living in a crowd; but, as it is, you dainty people have all the proverbs on your side. 'Good gear goes into little bulk;' 'Ill weeds grow apace.' I could quote you a dozen."

"It must be nice to be beautiful," said Di, not heeding, "beautiful as you are, Philippa."

Philippa answered her earnest look with an odd whimsical smile.

"What a dear innocent goose you are," she said, kissing her. "Of course it is nice. That is mamma calling. That kiss was for good-bye. We are two princesses going out on our adventures. When we meet again, what a great deal there will be to hear and to tell!"

Light words easily spoken. Who could know that the last hour of this their fair and prosperous friendship had almost arrived; that never again, spite of tears and brave prayers and perhaps sorrowful repentance, there could be entire unbroken truth on the one side, love that was not ashamed on the other? But these things were as yet in the distance.

Mrs. Henshaw came in with a great sweep and rustle of magnificent skirts, Blake following with an armful of wraps.

"Well, are you ready, young ladies?" said the matron, who was in excellent temper. "Philippa, where are your flowers? You must not keep us all waiting, child."

"I am quite ready, mamma."

"She has given them all to me," said Di, coming shyly forward. "She would do it. She never thinks of herself."

"She has made you look very nice, at any rate," said Mrs. Henshaw, with a thin smile. "You need a little colour; and Philippa always looks best in pure white, I must say."

"Then I'll wear these," said Philippa composedly, taking some rejected blossoms from a vase. "Please, dear old Blake, will you fetch me some pins—long ones?"

"Nonsense, Philippa," said her mamma sharply, "you really are too perverse. Pink and yellow! Do you want to make yourself a fright?"

"It will be considered the latest outcome of æstheticism. See if Mrs. Cross doesn't appear in a pink and yellow bonnet on Sunday. Besides, it is quite correct. This is the reign of tertiaries. No, Di, I won't have any of your roses. You must be content with primaries."

"What a wilful child she is!" Mrs. Henshaw addressed herself to the other girl. "And she doesn't look so very ugly, after all, does she? I was like that myself, you know. I could wear any colour—not like some people who have always to study their complexions."

"She looks beautiful!" said Di, with warm admiration.

"And you look very nice, too, my dear, though I must not make you vain."

"I've heard of a royal lady who pinned moral

maxims inside her dress as a check on vanity," said Philippa gravely. "She could wear the richest stuffs with safety then. Suppose you try it, Di. I would recommend 'Pride goes before a fall.'"

"Never mind her," said Mrs. Henshaw graciously; "you really look very nice. We know somebody who will think so, at any rate—don't we? Oh, we shall make a great impression in a certain quarter, never fear."

"Don't be mysterious, mamma," said Philippa, still busy over her flowers. "We mean to impress everybody—to conquer all round."

"I know what Mrs. Henshaw means," said Di, flushing and speaking with a touch of indignation. She had heard these gentle insinuations more than once of late. "But it is quite a mistake. Ralph is my dear old friend, and we are always glad to see each other; but he is not—not what you mean." She turned to the lady. "And I don't think it is nice to be always thinking about lovers."

"Well, I must say"—Mrs. Henshaw drew herself up—"that is a pretty speech for a young lady to make!"

"I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to be rude. I only meant to tell you it was a mistake."

"It is only mamma's way of saying a pretty

thing," said Philippa, coming up and laying her hands on Di's shoulders. "She thinks us irresistible, and fancies that everybody must find us so."

"Oh, pray don't make excuses for me, my dear," said her mother loftily. "I am accustomed to be misconstrued. I can bear it in silence. If Miss Ouvry does not care that I should interest myself in her, I can refrain from offending in future."

This was hardly a prosperous beginning to an evening of gaiety or of conquest, and it was a relief to all present when Pepita burst in to announce that the carriage was waiting, and the señor ready to conduct the ladies to it.

This small damsel's black eyes blazed with excitement as she stared at the grand dresses. Concha was hovering in the background to peep at them, too; and even Blake, the prim and sedate, was full of mild fussiness. Deonys felt as if every one was enjoying her *début* except herself. She could not get used to this new self. She had begun by making a mistake.

Mr. Ouvry politely gave his arm to the older lady.

"You will look after my little girl," he said, as he carefully adjusted the trains before shutting the door of the carriage. "Di, I'll look in upon you by-and-by."

"I will do my best," said Mrs. Henshaw, still

offended. "But some people do not choose to be restrained."

"Oh, do come soon, padre," Di said imploringly.

She felt as if she were parting from all her past. There was a weight on her heart that was hardly in accord with the feelings ascribed in novels to young ladies going to a first ball. Still, when she reached the great room, not very crowded as yet, and saw the lights and the decorations, and heard the inspiring music, she could not help forgetting her unwillingness for a little, and enjoying the spectacle.

Among other things, she had prepared herself for the unpleasantness of a conversation with Mrs. St. John, who, she had innocently fancied, would be ready to let fly the light shafts of her wit at every new-comer. But Mrs. St. John was much too busy to take the smallest notice of her, and the few words she said were all addressed to Philippa, in whom she recognized a friendly rival.

They had hardly been seated, when Di espied Miss Piper making timid signs to her behind her cheap fan.

"She wants me. I must go to her. She is all alone," she said; and, without waiting a reply, she rose and crossed the room, forsaking Mrs. Henshaw, to her deep displeasure.

"I wash my hands of her!" she cried. "A girl who can walk about a ball-room alone! Indeed, I cannot undertake to be responsible for her behaviour."

Nothing but the desire to give pleasure to her friend would have lent her courage to cross that wide space. But she did not see the many eyes that watched her modest steps. All her glances were for Miss Piper—a transformed, radiant, smiling Miss Piper.

She got an eager welcome.

"Oh, do come and sit beside me, my dear. I have been looking for you for the last hour or more. I came early, you know—too early, I suppose, though it was the hour mentioned—and perhaps Mrs. St. John was detained."

"Were you alone?" said Di wonderingly.

"For a little while—a little while. But it was very amusing, you know, watching them light up, and hearing the musicians tune their instruments." Then Miss Barbara came, and, oh, my dear, she was so displeased!"

"With you?"

"With me? Oh yes. But with Mrs. St. John, too. I thought at first she would not speak to me, but she did—across the room. She said we were invited at eight, and she came at eight. Between ourselves it was ten minutes past eight when she entered, but, you know, Miss Barbara

thinks her watch infallible. And she said it was so rude of the hostess not to receive us. I was trembling all the time in case some one should hear her. There were servants about, and you never can tell a servant from a gentleman when they are all dressed alike. I was so nervous. Think if the minister had come in !”

“Well, he would deserve to be scolded,” said Di, smiling. “I think it is very stupid to ask people so long before you want or expect them.”

“I was always taught that it was polite to be punctual. It was one of dear mamma’s rules ; but Miss Barbara blamed me for being too soon. I am sure poor Robert’s watch keeps excellent time,” cried the little lady, referring to a large gold chronometer that ticked in her belt. “Miss Barbara is a little difficult to please.”

“I am sure she must have been pleased with your dress. It looks splendid,” said Di heartily.

“Do you think so, my dear ?” Miss Piper smoothed her blue satin lap with great satisfaction. “She thought it very extravagant—quite sinful ; but I told her it was a present.” She drooped her meek, rose-crowned head. “She knows I am too poor to buy such things for myself, but there cannot be any harm in accepting a present from a near relation. If it

were another gentleman—but that I could not have permitted.”

“There is Mrs. Cross,” said Di, feeling that this was dangerous ground; “and that is her niece in pink. Isn’t she pretty?”

“A little forward, perhaps. Look, my dear, she is talking to two gentlemen at once. We must be more careful. It is better not to dance too much—not every dance.”

“Oh, I don’t want to dance at all,” Di answered, shrinking back a little. There was a group of hothouse plants near her that made a soft screen, behind which she could peep out safely on the pageant. “I think it is much nicer to look on.”

“Yes; we are very snug here and our dresses go very well together; but perhaps one might dance a little. Not to look peculiar, you know.”

But though Di protested again that she would much rather sit still in her corner, this was not to be allowed. There were one or two who had discovered the sweet face, half hidden by the sheltering screen of greenery, and the American Minister—the most good-natured of hosts—took care that she was not neglected.

Mr. Washington Bean strolled up to her presently.

“You’ll dance?” said this gracious youth, who was sparing of his remarks.

"No," said Di promptly, with a like economy of words.

"Can't waltz," said Mr. Bean, stroking the down on his lip. "Makes me giddy, you know; but I can worry through a quadrille."

He looked at her for a minute or two in silence, slowly fixing a glass in his eye, then he said laconically—

"Pleasure of the next quadrille?"

Di acquiesced without much cordiality. "There is Philippa going to dance," she said, looking beyond the young gentleman and trying to forget his presence.

The words acted like magic on Mr. Bean, who turned and left her with as much eagerness as so finished a man of the world could permit himself to show. To be surprised by nothing, to be shocked at nothing, to take pleasure in nothing—this was his aim in life.

"I hope he will forget all about that quadrille," said Di with fervour; but she was not to be allowed to sit in peace. The Minister himself came up with a young man on his arm, and this time there was no refusing.

She went through her part reluctantly, but with a certain shy grace that her companion of the moment found very attractive. He was a young *attaché*, new to his honours and naïvely proud of them; and he gave her a great deal of

information without caring much whether she answered or not. When the dance was over she went back to her corner. She had glanced, indeed, at Mrs. Henshaw, but that lady's aspect was forbidding, and the chair next her was occupied.

"That wasn't so bad," she said confidingly to her friend. "He speaks English, and he has a great deal to say. I hope, if I must dance again, that the next one will talk a great deal, too."

"Oh, but you must be careful, you must, indeed," cried Miss Piper, with anxiety. "Young men are so much less respectful, so much less chivalrous than they used to be. I have not been dancing and, my dear, I hear them say such things—such broad compliments!" The meek lady flushed under her roses.

"Oh, that one talked all the time about himself," said Di innocently. "Look at Philippa! I never saw any one dance so beautifully."

Philippa was, indeed, fair to see as she moved with sprightly grace through the mazes of the dance.

"Her flowers have not spoiled her. She could wear anything and look just the same," Di said, with much enthusiasm.

Miss Piper sighed, a little tremulous, deprecating sigh. Philippa was, indeed, a brilliant

and charming sight, yet her smiles hardly compensated for Miss Barbara's black looks—Miss Barbara's ostentatious aloofness as she sat among the matrons of high degree on a crimson-covered upper dais. Once upon a time Miss Piper had sat there too, and had taken her modest share in the trenchant criticism of the hour; but now the wide length of the hall divided the shabby black *moire antique* from the too-lustrous blue satin. This sitting, as it were, below the salt, was distressing only because it signalized the great breach that yawned between these two old friends; and there was the cause of it all, flitting lightly and with a perfect abandonment to the enjoyment of the moment, smiling on every one alike.

Miss Piper followed Philippa's light figure without a spark of reproach in her mild blue eyes, anxious only that her little advices and warnings should not have been given in vain.

"She is a beautiful creature," she echoed Di's praises; "and so amiable; but, my dear, don't you think she is a little—just a little imprudent, and, perhaps, too frank?" She brought the words out timidly, as if there was utmost uncharitableness in the charge.

"It is her way. She means nothing. She is the same to every one."

"It will raise expectations; it will make the

gentlemen very confident. And suppose she should get into trouble again? It is not myself I am thinking of." She gave the assurance eagerly. "I would do it all again, if I could help her. But she is so young; there is plenty of time. Why should she throw herself away, and waste her youth?"

"I think she will be more careful. I think there is——"

What was Di about to say, and why did the words fail suddenly? She was looking towards the door by which the later guests were yet entering. It was Felix who came in now, almost as if her thought had summoned him. She watched him with a strange, unexplained anxiety as he made his greetings. Now Mrs. Henshaw's fan was reached out to touch him lightly, and he turned to listen and to speak. Then some newer comer claimed her attention, and she saw him thread his way round the room.

The dance was over, and the music stopped with some abrupt chords. Philippa was walking slowly back to her mother's side. Why did he not claim her when she was free? Why did he come straight, as if he saw no one else, to a distant corner, where the branching palms half hid a young girl dressed in white, and with red roses in her hair?

"I have found you at last," he said, standing before her.

"You have just come in?"

She looked with innocent, troubled wonder at the expression of fire and earnestness in his usually careless, laughing eyes.

"Have I?" he said absently; then he turned to Miss Piper. "I want to introduce you to a friend of mine," he said. "Will you let me bring him? He is staying at the hotel, and he has just come from England."

"A gentleman?" said Miss Piper, fluttered, pleased, perturbed all at once.

"He is an old gentleman, and I think he knows some of your people. When I spoke of your brother having been chaplain here, he seemed to think he once knew him. If you will let me bring him——"

"Oh, if he knew Robert, that makes such a difference, and it would be a great pleasure. There are so few to whom one can speak of these things; but a stranger——" She hesitated and sighed.

Felix took this for a permission, and went off to find his friend.

Presently he returned with a bald-headed gentleman, who looked mild enough to still the most maidenly fears. He made the presentation in due form, and then it was found that, in

order to make room for this stranger, Deonys had to rise.

Felix took it quite as a matter of course that he should give her his arm and lead her away. For what other reason had he hunted up this new acquaintance and tracked him through the labyrinth of many corridors to the billiard-room?

"Have you been dancing much?" he asked; and then he glanced at her programme, and saw but two or three names scribbled on its white surface. "May I?" He took the little pencil, and put his own initials here and there, almost at random, down the page.

Deonys looked with alarm at this repeated "F. C."

"Oh, please, not so many times," she said. "I don't want to dance at all; and I am going home quite early."

"You don't want to dance?" he said eagerly, as if this pleased him. "No more do I. But you won't go away before supper? Let me see. The dancers are sure to make a rush for the buffet after this waltz down here; that's about the time when everybody begins to feel hungry. If you want to go home soon, we might go down earlier, when it is quiet, don't you think? And we'll get Miss Piper to come with us."

"Miss Piper would be pleased."

It seemed to her afterwards as if she had never given her consent. All the time he talked he was leading her, skilfully skirting the newly-formed set of dancers, out of the ball-room and into a long, narrow hall, draped and festooned, and made beautiful with rare flowers. At the upper end of it was a broad low seat beneath a great window, its coloured panes hidden by a heavy velvet curtain. No one seemed to have discovered this remote refuge, and he led her straight to it.

"If you don't want to dance, it is cooler out here," he said easily; "and it is impossible to talk with people whirling and twirling all about you, and treading on your toes. Waltzing is the most arbitrary proceeding in the world. You are not allowed to look on in peace; you are forced to take to it in self-defence."

"I thought it was very nice to look on; but, then, that is because I dance so badly. If I could dance like Philippa——"

"Queen Philippa is holding a great court to-night," he answered lightly. "She seems to be engaged ever so many deep."

"Then you asked her?" She felt a great sense of relief, yet she wondered when he could have done it. "What a pity you were too late!"

He did not answer her directly. He was

wondering if she did not feel cold. Should he fetch her a cloak? And did she really prefer sitting here to having the tips of her toes trodden on by those aggressive couples?


And for all reply Di smiled, and remarked that it was very cool and pleasant, as, indeed, it was, now that she knew herself to be not taking that which belonged to another.

"I've got to tell you all about Kylmure, you know," he went on; "and, since I hear that you are going there by-and-by, I must prepare you. You will require to stand an examination on it. Miss Bell will expect you to be quite up in everything Scotch, won't she?"

"Bell spoke of London," said Di, with a sigh; "but I should like the country best, I think, except that it is further away. Yes, please, tell me about it in case I go."

So he began, and he discovered that there was a great deal to tell. He found himself describing with much brightness, and a touch of poetry, perhaps, the life of that far distant island. It was an idle, dream-like picture: glens and valleys, where the spring revelled while winter lingered reluctant to go on the mountain tops; placid waters, touched with sunset-fire, or with the tenderness of saffron-tinted dawns; moors glorious with autumn's bravest colours.

He spoke, too, of storms that rage upon this far-off shore; of long wild nights he had spent under an upturned boat for sheer joy in watching the anger of the foaming surf leaping up to meet the lashing, wrestling rain, and in listening to the screech of the sea-birds, heard above all the tempest. Then he described the cottage, hardly better than a hut, where he and his friend "put up" in autumn, for there was no house that went with the shootings. She seemed to see it all: the housekeeper's daughter, who had "a spine in her back," and who lay, very patient and contented, on every fine day in the little garden, where curly greens and coral fuchsias grew in contented proximity (somehow she knew—she could not have told how—that Felix was very good to this poor girl, and supplied her with books, and, perhaps, with more substantial comforts); the housekeeper herself, with her limited English and her unlimited Highland pride; all the work of the homestead, too; the ripening, watched so eagerly, of the patch of yellow corn; the anxious care with which not only the cows and sheep, but the very hens were tethered to keep their wandering feet from temptation, while this slow coining of gold went on; then, in due time, and often late in the autumn months, the ingathering of the harvest, when



everybody, gentle and simple, lent a willing hand.

It was perhaps a trite enough picture to those very familiar with this long-discovered land of the north-west; but to this young girl who listened, her wide innocent eyes fixed on the speaker with the most absorbed attention, it was all new and all wonderful as a land of dreams.

"Oh, I hope Bell will take me there!" she said.

"Possibly I may be there myself. I often take a run up there," he answered carelessly.

What was perhaps less wonderful than this dreamland, was the fact that the time passed with great speed while her companion talked. He had so much to say, and he took care to say it so that she should feel interested—almost compelled to attend—and that result, as we have seen, was not difficult to achieve.

She forgot altogether the part she was supposed to be taking, as a young lady making her curtsy to society. The young gentlemen who should alarm her with their flowing French and their agility in waltzing, were forgotten too; the host, if he saw her at all, had the discretion to keep these aspirants aloof. Her thoughts followed Felix into other lands, strange, wonderful countries, where one day she, too,

might wander. She was very happy: her imagination was stirred; fitful images and pleasant visions flitted before her. It was a beautiful, simple life that he described, and he seemed to be giving her the assurance that it would one day be her own. Afterwards she remembered that he had said, "Some day I should like to show you that," "Some day we shall look at this together." At the moment it had seemed very natural that he should make such proposals. It was only afterwards, when other light had been cast on them, when she was alone and had time to think, that she understood the words. Then she recoiled from them ashamed, with cheeks that burned under the accusation that to listen had been disloyal.

But as yet no illumination had come to her. She had not any eyes for the couples who now and again strayed from the ball-room to cool themselves in the long hall, and whose glances, betraying amusement, might have enlightened her. Among those who came and came again more than once was Philippa, who, with charming impartiality, was making a great many people happy, and was listening gracefully to compliments in all languages.

On one of the occasions when she wandered into the hall, her companion was the young *attaché*, who had been Di's first partner. This

fickle youth was confiding everything over again to the new listener—his prospects, his position, his superior knowledge of State affairs. It pleased him to talk in French. It was the thing to do, and phrases that might be condemned as egotistical if worded in English sound beautifully modest in a foreign tongue.

“You can say so many more things; you can express such nice shades of meaning; you can make remarks that don't offend, you know,” he explained. “You have travelled a great deal, and you must have felt the value of this.”

“I have travelled a great deal; but it is mostly the English side of foreign life that I have seen, and my country people think that every foreigner is bound to understand the English tongue.”

“Well, that's just it; you know that's just where the advantage of living abroad and knowing other languages lies. In America or England you must talk as others do; but here you can say a thing to an American or an Englishman in French, you know, a broad thing, and he takes it all for granted. He thinks it's the license of the language.”

“That is a new light,” said Philippa gravely. “When I want to say a broad thing I will remember that.”

“Of course, everybody talks it here,” this

persistent admirer of the Gallic tongue went on; "it's the court language."

"Yes," said Philippa, "I suppose so. We fondly hoped to see something of Spanish life—the romantic side of it that one reads about—the Spain of Don Quixote; but the knights I have met have not been very romantic. It is difficult to be interesting, I dare say, when you are not sure of your tenses."

"Oh, if you want to see the Spaniards at home, you will have to wait, I can tell you. They are the most inhospitable people in Europe. I've been here six months now, and I've not been inside the door of a Spanish house. They would not believe me, if I told them that in New York."

"I dare say not. Then there is no hope for me," she said, with fine gravity.

"Well, not in the upper circles, at any rate. I was disappointed at first; but I have made up my mind now that there is nothing worth regretting. I am told they never entertain. They live in a mean kind of style, anyhow."

"That is not my way," said Philippa, shaking her head. "I shall always believe that I have lost a great deal, that I have missed a splendid opportunity by not getting behind these closed doors. I don't know French so well as you,

but I remember one phrase from my school-days. I think it is Montaigne who says it: 'On voyage moins pour s'instruire que pour se désillusionner.'"

She was looking fixedly at the other end of the gallery, where a white dress, trimmed with red roses, was to be seen; but if there was any double meaning in her words, this young *attaché* was not acute enough to read it.

How long the spell that held those two, seated alone in their remote corner, might have lasted, it is impossible to say; but it was broken suddenly and completely by a sound of many footsteps. A door near them was thrown wide open, and the hall seemed all in a moment to be filled with people.

Di looked round, and, with a start, she awoke, and came back from dreamland.

"What is it?" she asked.

There was a rustle of dresses, a murmur of voices, and of low laughter, and many eyes seemed to rest upon the two who sat in conspicuous isolation.

"It's the matrons going in for supper," said Felix explaining. "I forgot they did it that way here. We'll have to wait, I suppose. It would be considered 'cheeky' if we went in with our elders, wouldn't it?"

He spoke lightly, as if he did not mind, or

wish her to mind the battery of looks, amused or indifferent, directed at them; but Di did not answer.

She, too, looked at them all a little shyly, yet with a pleasant interest in the smiling lords and rustling ladies till one pair of eyes met her own. It was Mrs. Henshaw, who passed her leaning on the arm of a decorated gentleman; she was so close that her silken train brushed Di's feet, so near that there was no mistaking the cold, almost malignant anger of her eyes.

Deonys, to whom no one was ever cold or cruel, shrunk back surprised and frightened.

"What have I done? Why should she look like that?" she questioned herself, flushing and growing pale. "Oh, what have I done!"

Had Felix seen that look, too?

"Shall we go and see what Miss Piper and her cavalier are about?" he asked, standing up and offering her his arm. "It will be cooler in there now."

She got up mechanically.

"I must go away," she said, confused and miserable. She took one step forward, not noticing his outstretched arm. She saw Miss Barbara and she went to her swiftly.

Miss Barbara, the last of the procession, stepped out of the ranks, waving away Major Gilbs with a gesture that was a command.

She strode up stern and unrelenting. A sombre, severe figure.

"What have I done?" said Di, this time audibly.

"What have you done?" Miss Barbara echoed grimly. "You have made yourself the talk of the evening. That I should have lived to hear that woman"—she indicated with a nod Mrs. Henshaw's departing skirts—"speak of you as she spoke to-night! As for him"—she glanced at Felix with an air of great and righteous wrath—"I am ashamed of myself that I ever thought well of him. Was it not enough for him to make one girl's name the gossip of the place? Must he set them talking about you, too?"

Di checked her with a little touch upon her arm.

The girl's face was pale, and her proud, tender mouth was quivering, but she said, quietly and firmly—

"If it was wrong it was my fault. Do you hear me? It was all my fault. It was because I did not understand. I did not think."

"Your fault?" Miss Barbara looked at her, still stern, but perhaps not without inward relenting. "Well, you'll have to bear it between you. It takes more than one to do most of the mischief of the world. I'm not going to measure

out which of you was most to blame. You have set people's idle, foolish tongues going, and that's enough for me."

Deonys shrank involuntarily from this hard truth; but she said in her clear, steady tones—

"You will say nothing—to him. It was my doing. I did not wish to dance. And now I am going away. I ought not to have come. I will never go to a ball again."

She left Miss Barbara before that lady could deliver herself of further rebuke or remonstrance. She walked quickly down the long hall, looking neither to right nor left, bent only on reaching solitude. At the other end of it a door suddenly opened, and Malleson appeared.


"Why, Di, I was coming to look for you," he said.

"Oh, Ralph," she said, thinking it quite natural he should be at hand to help her in her extremity, "will you take me home?"

"Home already! Are you tired? Have you danced so much? Let me look at you."

He took her by the two hands and wheeled her round under a blazing chandelier.

"It's all nonsense. You want some supper, and then we shall tread our measure together. You think I'm too venerable to dance? How do you know that I haven't been practising my steps for the last month in the privacy of my



den? You ask old Anchel if he hasn't heard the boards creaking. Come along; I'm burning to distinguish myself."

"I must go home."

She had much ado to keep her lips from trembling; she could not bring them to say anything more.

"Di," he said, smiling at her; "you are a dreadful little unbeliever. Well, come and have some supper, at any rate. I met your father just now. What do you suppose he will think if he finds you flown?"

"I don't know," she said, finding words in the urgency of her need. "Oh, Ralph, will you never understand? Let me pass. I must go. I'll go alone, if you won't take me."

Then at last he understood that some intolerable trouble was pressing down upon her, and that he was torturing her by his easy phrases.

"Has that woman——" he began impetuously, and then he checked himself. This was no time for questions.

"Come," he said simply. He led her out and wrapped her in his own great coat, which he had just taken off. Then, at last, they reached the silence of the clear, austere, starlit night.

He did not ask her any more questions, or trouble her with words at all. It was but a little way to the Preciados, and they traversed


it quickly. He went with her upstairs and into the sitting-room, where a dim light was burning. He stirred the smouldering fire, and placed her in her own little chair near it. Then he crossed to the kitchen, and roused the sleepy Pepa, moving drowsily among her pots and pans, and made her warm the coffee that was ready for Mr. Ouvry on his return.

"Look here, Pepa," he said, "I'll give you a new pañuela if you will be clever and light a fire in your mistress's room. Do you hear me? Is the coffee warm? Come, stir about, and get the room ready."

Pepa stared at the unwonted spectacle of the grave English señor, prying into odd corners and lifting the lids of her pans distractedly; but she was sensible of the magnificence of the bribe, and did her best to earn it.

Deonys paid little heed to all this fuss and bustle; she longed to be alone. It was all Malleson could do for her, this outward service, this tending of the body. It is often all that the best and most loving of us can do for another in our imperfect knowledge of an inward trouble.

She might be morbid in her sensitiveness; she might misjudge, mistake, in her inexperience; but all his soul rose up in resentment against any one who should hurt her by so



much as a look, and he left her, vowing a great anger against the disturber of her peace.

He did not go back to the ball-room. He went home to his rooms, and put on once again the shabby and familiar garment that belonged to his working hours. The dress coat of venerable cut, which he had worn so philosophically, he flung aside with something of a grim and sardonic smile. Three minutes of Mrs. St. John's reception had been enough for him.

CHAPTER X.

"A lonely spirit, unquiet."

"BUT must I really go, father?"

"You have written the letter, haven't you?"

"Yes; but I could write another." That hardly seemed to Di a sufficient argument.

"So you will, I dare say, to announce that you are on your way. I'm afraid you haven't a logical mind, my child."

Mr. Ouvry looked up from his plate with a smile. He was in an excellent humour, and nothing that even a foolish, illogical girl could say had power to disturb him.

"You have not given me one good argument why you should disappoint your cousin."

"Ah, if it were a disappointment," she said slowly. She could have given him a great many reasons, and he would have said that they were all of them more or less frivolous. It is always the strongest and most imperative motive that is never put into words.

She made no further protest. Her father, for some inscrutable reason of his own, willed that she should pay this visit to England; and she never disputed anything that he wished strongly.

"I suppose I haven't a well-regulated mind," she said, with a smile. "Padre, let me give you some more coffee."

"Oh, you will like it," he said, as he passed her his cup; "it will impress you immensely. One's first visit to London is an epoch in one's life. I wish I might be there to see how it strikes you."

"Won't you come?" she asked, with a touch of eagerness.

He shook his head.


"England is not for me," he said, with soft melancholy. "I have grown used to my exile. Do you remember that poor wretch to whom they offered his freedom, and who begged on his knees to be allowed to end his days in the Bastille? His liberty was a commodity he didn't know how to use. After thirty years of prison walls one grows to love their shelter."

"Prison walls! Our's is a very large Bastille, I think," she said, smiling. And yet she felt at moments as if this great city—the only home she had ever known—was indeed too narrow for her. The ball was a thing of the past, considered

in the light of the thick-coming gaieties that had followed, but Miss Barbara's words had scorched Deonys, and the burning wounds still ached. To her it seemed as if that night would never float away among the things that are forgotten, or remembered only at passing moments. It was always there—always present. She had made people talk about her. They had laughed and jested and made small insinuations. They had judged her, and condemned her. She hid her burning cheeks in her hands, though there was none to see. If Miss Barbara could have measured the depth of her shame, the torture of her hurt pride, she would have recoiled in amazement.

Miss Barbara, like most people who act on impulse, had already so far cooled from her first wrath as to be willing to take Di back to a measure of favour, if Di had given her the opportunity. But this she did not do. She hid herself, and saw no one. Miss Barbara, carrying her small olive branch, not to be presented, however, until she had delivered herself of a further instalment of her mind, found the girl flown. Concha, resentful and ungracious, answered the lady's execrable Spanish with contempt.

“How was she to know where the señorita had gone? Was she the child's jailer?”



Miss Barbara, being but human, resented Di's absence, and tramped downstairs with somewhat chilled ardour. The chances were, that when Di was again to be seen that carefully prepared scolding would be a little emphasized.

As for Felix, he was very speedily restored to favour. Indeed, Di tormented herself quite needlessly with picturing Miss Barbara's attitude towards him on the night of the ball.

After she had left, the young man, having a shrewd guess, perhaps, at the state of matters, came up and presented his arm with the utmost nonchalance to the offended lady.

"I see Ralph is taking care of Miss Ouvry," he said. "Miss Barbara, won't you take compassion on me, and take me to have some supper? I'm tremendously hungry."

When a young man looks at you with a smile in his eyes, and deprecates your indignation with the most charming good nature, it is impossible, at least if you are a maiden lady, to keep up a show of anger long. Miss Barbara made a valiant stand, but she had to surrender.

There never was such an attentive youth. He got her the most comfortable chair and a small table all to herself. He rushed away for her spectacles, which, after the manner of spectacles, were absent at the most important moment; he tempted her with every good

thing on the table. You would have said that it was the most delightful and congenial task to wait on this hard-featured old lady, dressed in an antique and bygone fashion, and that he had never cared to look at a girl in his life. Who could resist such blandishments?

"And will you tell me which of them it is?" she asked dryly, as he came back with the champagne; "or is it to be turn about?"

"There is only one—there never was but one," he answered earnestly.

"I thought there were two. Maybe you were trying which you liked best. Perhaps you'll let me know when you've made up your mind," she said sarcastically.

"It is made up. Miss Barbara, you must help me."

She assured him that she would promise no such thing. She was not going to spend herself to help a weather-cock to twirl with every wind that blows. Yet in her inmost heart she was triumphant. It was not Philippa, then, it was Deonys, this child of her love, whom he had chosen. She had hardly the heart to scold him for his indiscretion. But Di must not be acquainted with her good fortune until she had had her misdeeds pointed out to her. Miss Barbara averred that, even if

it was an honest courtship, that was no excuse for behaviour that was "not pretty."

But as for Di, this supposed happiness that was about to be offered to her was the chief cause of her misery.

She was growing very fast in these days, and she understood now something of what Felix had meant by his words and looks. The knowledge brought her keenest pain. She wanted, above all things, to be true to Philippa. Why, then, should loyalty to Philippa all at once seem so very hard a thing?

It was to the gallery that she fled; there she could be quite sure of solitude. Mrs. Henshaw's patronage of art had ceased. Here, least of all, Felix was likely to be found. Here were only the dumb, friendly pictures, that tell you their own story and never ask for yours in return.

It was here that she had learned much of the little she knew. It was not an education after the pattern of Newnham or Girton, but it went for something, for in these echoing corridors you can hold communion with the master minds of the world.

True, she knew hardly more than the alphabet of their language. She passed fiery Goya with a shudder; Ribera's martyrdoms, and his fleshless yellow saints frightened her; there was all the pain and penance of life, and none of

its beauty or its holiness, in the faces of his wasted anchorites. She looked with great respect at Bassano—the painter of broad backs and of shining pots and pans—with some comprehension of the splendid life and movement, the gaiety of Velasquez; but it was to Bartolomé Esteban Murillo that she gave her whole heart's love. This sweet interpreter of grace and tenderness, and of rare colour, seemed to her to imprison a prayer in every canvas he touched. His "Virgin of Sorrows," with her rapt, upward gaze, appealed to her by her very humanness. She was not far-off, remote—an angel appearing for a moment out of paradise, like the madonnas of Raphael. She was but a woman, understanding the sorrows of other women, touched even while her eyes are lifted to heaven, with the woes that darken this dark earth.

It was to her the girl whispered, "You understand"; it was to her she looked for sympathy, comprehension, consolation. While Di flitted lightly day by day through the long empty galleries—smiling sometimes at the fantastic conceptions of Teniers, the dancing and piping frogs, the monsters, dwarfs, skeletons, and always the beautiful lady who, with feminine subtlety, appears now in green, now in lustrous satin, again in court-dress, with

feathers on her head, to the distraction of the sorely tempted Anthony, who peeps at her from his cave; now standing with great awe before Raphael's "Pasma de Sicilia"—there were visitors who came, and who went away disappointed from the door of the house in the Preciados.

Felix ran up once or twice, and one day Mrs. St. John arrived to make a rare visit, but Concha shut the door on all this Parisian finery.

Mrs. St. John was more fortunate in finding the ladies in the lower house at home.

"I've been to see that little girl," she said, "but she was out. I am dying to ask her what Miss Barbara said to her that night, you know, at our ball. I couldn't resist taking Miss Barbara to have a peep at them in the hall; it was as good as a play to see her face. She was downright mad with her. We think nothing of that sort of thing at home, but you English are so dreadfully proper, and so stiff. You make prudes of your girls."

She was seated in Mrs. Henshaw's rocking-chair, and she tilted it back with a laugh.

"I prefer that my daughter should be called a prude rather than a flirt," said Mrs. Henshaw, with great stateliness.

"Well, now, we don't think much of a flirtation, you know. It comes natural. And it

seems to me, if you curb young people too much, you just make them sly. You force them to make appointments about which their mammas know nothing." She glanced at Philippa from under her eyelashes. "I don't think there was an atom of harm in those two sitting together the whole evening. He's what I call a brilliant young man. He's more like an American. I'd listen to him for hours myself, if he asked me."

"He is a delightful young man," said Philippa calmly.

"And you're not jealous?" Mrs. St. John turned to her with a quick laugh. "Now, it was me, I'd be burning with jealousy. I let every one know it."

"That is one of the disadvantages of being English," said Philippa lightly. "We haven't your fine frankness. We can't express ourselves with the same charming freedom."

"Well, I was always frank. You may laugh, but you are jealous all the same, aren't you?"

"Oh yes. Concealment, like a worm in the bud, is feeding on my damask cheek. I'm a good actor, you see."

"Well, I always said that of you." Mrs. St. John put out one pretty foot and looked contemplatively at it with her head on one side.

"Philippa, you forget yourself," said Mrs. Henshaw with great dignity. "Of whom, pray, need my daughter be jealous?" She turned to her guest. "We make every allowance for difference of national feeling, but permit me to say that in England we do not make use of such expressions. We consider them not in good taste—not nice."

"In fact, we have dropped the word out of our dictionaries," said Philippa, smiling; "we don't know what it means. I am sorry to fall short of your expectations, but the truth is, Di and I are excellent friends."

"Well, I declare!" Mrs. St. John rose, and held out her beautifully gloved hand. "You English are a mystery to me. I suppose it's because you are a dying race—that's what Mr. St. John says—that you are so cold-blooded."

"That must be it. People's feelings get blunted as they grow old."

"Well, you'll tell her that I came to see her, any way?"

"Oh yes, I will tell her. I'm going to have tea with her to-night."

"Philippa, what did you mean by talking like that?" said her mamma, when Mrs. St. John had rustled away.

"It was she who talked 'like that.' She is

epitomized American, double-distilled essence of the States. I wonder what such people are made for, unless it is to point a moral."

"She is extremely unladylike."

"I should use a stronger word."

"I hope you won't copy her manners. If it were not for her position here—and how she got it, I'm sure I don't know. But that was not what I meant."

"If you mean that I was rude to her, she did not discover it. She is as invulnerable as—as Achilles, wasn't it?"

"Don't make classical allusions; it sounds so pedantic."

"I'm not likely to err in that way," said Philippa demurely, "for my stock of them is very meagre. Achilles was a lucky hit. Was that what you meant to warn me against, mamma?"

"You know quite well what I mean, though you try to beg the question."

"Yes, I think I know." She looked straight into her mother's uneasy eyes, her own flashing with sudden fire. "You mean that I am to join in this foolish, wicked talk about that poor little girl upstairs; that I am to shake my head over her—I!"

"It was extremely bad taste, to say the least of it; and a forward, bold girl, must expect

people to talk of her. I don't blame any one who would take advantage of such behaviour. Gentlemen think it amusing for the time; but they despise girls who carry them on. They have no real respect for them."

"Every one respects Di. I won't hear a word against her."

"It is very sad to see how family traits descend," Mrs. Henshaw went on, occupied with her own train of thought—"heredity, you know—a most interesting study; I have a firm belief in it. You saw how she left me the moment we entered the ball-room, and sought out that ridiculous Miss Piper?"

"Is that heredity?" said Philippa innocently.

"I for one could never countenance such extravagance. Why, that blue satin must have cost at least a guinea a yard! And to choose her, instead of me—not even a married woman. But I always had my misgivings, when I saw how like the girl is to her mother. I am not often mistaken, and now, you see, the taint is coming out."

Philippa laughed, as she always did, at her mother's inconsequent speeches. This scrappy way of doing her thinking aloud had its droll side.

"I don't know what the mother may have

done," she said, "but if Di is like her, she must have been wholly sweet and good."

"Ah! you will never know, never! I have kept my sorrows to myself. I have never troubled you with them"—she spoke with a touch of real pathos—"and I want to save you from suffering as I suffered. You should remember that when I ask you to give up anything, it is because I am thinking only of your good. And you ought to try and please me, when I tell you it is you I am thinking of." Her voice grew eager and almost shrill.

"But not to give up Di," Philippa answered quickly, earnest now, too; "that would only do me harm."

Her heart fired up, made its passionate claim to truth and faithfulness. She felt instinctively that her safety lay in these. At the moment she meant them wholly.

Mrs. Henshaw said nothing more. With all her slovenliness of speech she knew where to stop. She knew, for instance, never to introduce Felix Chester's name into any discussion of Di's conduct. Some instinct warned her that there would be danger in the topic.

Philippa, hot to prove her loyalty to friendship, went at once up the higher flight of stairs.

"Oh, Concha, she is always out now," she said, showing her disappointment in her mobile

face. "I will come back in the evening—to-night," she repeated, in her stammering Spanish.

The old serving woman's face beamed with friendliness. Nobody could resist this gracious young lady. She nodded her head, spread out her hands, shrugged her shoulders; it was a brilliant pantomime. Philippa laughed, calling out, as she ran downstairs again, that she would return—at night.

An hour later, while she was busy twisting together some scraps of lace and ribbon for the adornment of Mrs. Henshaw's head, that lady slipped out to take a walk.

She went away almost furtively, as if she feared to be questioned or recalled; she came back triumphant, important, the very sweep of her skirts was complacent.

Philippa sat in her low, straight-backed seat by the window, her laces and flowers scattered all about her. She was humming to herself a low French air with a sad refrain, but her voice was gay.

"J'avais donc dix-huit ans! j'étais donc plein de songes!"

"Look here, my child, I have a charming surprise for you." Mrs. Henshaw paused at the table in the middle of the room and searched her reticule for a little package. "He put them up in paper, he is so neat. I like to see

neatness in a man. Tickets for the Zarzuela. You know you have wanted all winter to go there, so this fits in delightfully, as we have no engagement."

Philippa glanced up, but she continued her careless song—

"O temps de rêverie, et de force et de grâce!

* * * * *

Vouloir tout de la vie, amour, puissance et gloire!

Être pur, être fier, être sublime et croire

A toute pureté!"

"It is an excellent piece," Mrs. Henshaw continued, a little more sharply. "He told me the name. Let me see; what was it? Oh yes, 'Dreams of Gold,'—a pretty name; something classic, you know, and with a moral. I dare say quite proper, or he would not have invited us."

"Who is he?" Philippa asked still negligently, bent on the nice adjustment of a rose.

"Did I not tell you? Major Gibbs is going with us. He is really very attentive."

"Oh, very attentive. That is a reward for the cake and wine."

"And—I believe Mr. Chester is to be there too. So, you see, we shan't be dull."

Philippa broke off her singing sharply.

"You asked him?" She looked straight at her mother.

"I mentioned that we were going."

Mrs. Henshaw left the room without meeting the glance of her daughter's serious eyes.

That evening Deonys had no guests except Ralph, who came often. He found her busy sewing, as he always did now. The house was very quiet; there was no sound of laughter from the balcony below.

They did not talk much while he smoked. Di was entirely silent about the past. She never alluded to the night of the ball. Malleson was left to guess at the source of her distress. Once he asked her, awkwardly enough, if she had spoken much with Mrs. Henshaw on that occasion.

"You were under her wing, weren't you?" he questioned her with apparent carelessness.

"No," she said, looking up at him quietly. "I sat with Miss Piper—at first. I never spoke to Mrs. Henshaw all evening."

"You haven't had a passage of arms with her, have you?" he asked, playfully. "I live in the fear of that myself, and, as I know I should get the worst of it, I keep out of her way."

"No," she answered again; but she gave no further explanation.

Then he knew that he was to ask her no questions. She would not make his desire to help her easy by any confessions.

On this night, as on others, she spoke eagerly of the chances of war, and of coming trouble. For love is not the only passion of life, and in these early February days the air was full of strange omens of disaster.

CHAPTER XI.

"Ay, every inch a king."

ONE morning Di leaned out of her window, and knew that the spring had come.

The air that met her softly as she opened her casement whispered the secret. It had lingered on the wide plains, brown no longer, but brave with tenderest, most vivid green. There were larks rising joyously with rapturous singing from the young wheat; the almond trees by the Manzanares had made haste to put out their pink blossoms, and were bending down to look at themselves in the clear water; the air thereabouts was sweet with the scent of hidden violets.

She needed no second summons. There were to be no pictures painted by man's hand for her this day, no confining walls while the spring was waiting to greet her, lurking in the alleys of the Campo del Moro. "I am coming," she said, nodding gravely, and she went and fetched her hat, and ran down the many steps.

Mr. Ouvry, for a wonder, had risen early, and called for his coffee while she still slept. She had slept late, and this was her waking.

In the Puerta del Sol there was a great gathering of people, thronging the side walks and the centre of the great square. She stood an instant, surprised, hesitating whether to try and penetrate the crowd to reach the Calle Major. Then she saw that the militia were on duty, that the windows of the Home Office bristled with soldiers. While she stood, uncertain whether to go back or forward, some one touched her on the arm. She looked up, startled, into Felix Chester's face.

"I was coming for you," he said. "You ought not to be out alone."

This was, indeed, all he said in words, but his eyes were saying, as plainly as possible, how glad he was to see her again.

"What has happened?" she asked.

"Haven't you heard? Listen. You will hear everybody chattering about it. They say the king has abdicated."

"Abdicated!" she echoed, looking up at him blankly.

"So they say. I'm afraid there's some truth in it."

"But will he go away—will they make him go away?" she asked, still bewildered.

"I suppose so. I believe some sanguine spirits proposed to establish a republic with Amadeo as president, but I rather think he would decline the honour. I don't suppose there will be any row. They can't even achieve a decent revolution here."

"But what made him do it?" she asked, thinking of her king.

"I can't make it out. I fancy nobody quite understands the muddle. They say Serrano and Sagasta wished him to decree the suspension of the Habeas Corpus, or its equivalent here. There is a rumour of a disturbance in the corps of artillery, too; but the real fact of the matter is, he can't manage them. They've been too much for him. As it was once said of Frenchmen, 'Gods are required to govern Spaniards.'"

"They have treated him shamefully!" she said indignantly.

"I thought you would like to see something of what is going on. We are all at Ralph's rooms. I came to fetch you." He drew her arm gently within his own as he spoke. "I haven't seen you for such a long time," he said. "Not since that night of Mrs. St. John's reception. I called once or twice, but Mr. Ouvry was always out."

"He goes out a great deal."

"And you, too. We did not fancy that our

next meeting was to be on the edge of a storm! What sensational paragraphs old Ralph will make out of it!"

She did not answer. This sudden assumption of power and authority troubled her. She had thought so often of their next meeting; she had meant to be so quiet, so calmly neutral, so even distant, perhaps, showing to others, with a touch of pride, that she could demean herself with discretion; and here he was guiding and protecting her, making a path for her through the close-gathered people, jealously caring for her; alluding lightly to that last time, too, as if it were all a matter of course!

"I think I had better go home," she said, making a faint resistance.

"I'm afraid I can't let you do that," he answered gravely, "unless you will let me stay with you."

A moment before he had been scorning the thought of danger; and now, all at once, it seemed as if there were tremendous possibilities of harm everywhere out of the circle of his presence.

"But Concha and Pepita ——"

"Oh, they are Spaniards and fierce Republicans, no doubt. That's quite another matter," he assured her eagerly. "They are all right; they can look after themselves."

"I can't understand it," she said, yet she let herself be led on. Was it all a dream?

"You will find everybody in Ralph's rooms. They seem to think him a tower of strength, dear old man. Miss Piper is there, too. She has been asking for you."

Malleeson had lately changed his quarters, and his rooms looked out upon the Cortes, thus affording a good view of the centre of interest. It was but a little way to reach them, but it took a long time to make a path through the crowd, here very dense. Felix struggled manfully, and took the utmost care of her, receiving all the pressure on his own broad shoulders.

At last he plunged into a side street, and leading his companion by devious and narrow ways, they at length reached the house, and entered it by a back door.

"Here we are at last," he cried. "And how we shall get out again is a question. You are not very tired, I hope? I'm afraid it was a rough walk for you."

"I am not at all tired," she answered, making haste to ascend the steps.

He followed her in silence till they reached the highest floor; but, before he knocked, he turned to her, and said hesitatingly—

"I wished to ask you something. It was so difficult to talk out there."

"Yes?"

"Surely you are not angry with me?" he said abruptly. "I have not vexed you, have I? I have been hoping to see you all these weeks——"

"But I was out, you know," she said gently, helping him. "When the weather is good I am out a great deal. And you have not offended me. How could you do that?"

"I have not seen you since that evening. I thought it was a splendid evening. There have been lots of balls since, but I didn't go to any of them. I didn't care about it."

"No?" She looked at him with her grave, direct glance. "Don't you think we had better go in?"

"If you wish it." He made haste to knock. He was a little disappointed. She was kind; but it was not like the last time.

When she entered the room she found that indeed everybody was there.

Her father was standing with Major Gibbs in one window, Mrs. Henshaw and Miss Piper shared the other. Mrs. Henshaw was seated, her feet thrust forward on a stool; the maiden lady's flounces occupied but a modest corner. Ralph, heedless of the chattering company, was scribbling busily at a table in the centre of the room, all littered with papers. He

looked up with a smile, and nodded as the door opened, and they passed in. The girl's face was grave, and a little proud as she came forward. Then Philippa stepped suddenly out from some unseen corner, and clasped her round the waist. Even Mrs. Henshaw extended the tips of her carefully gloved fingers. Miss Piper's greeting was, as always, effusive. It seemed to Di as if she were suddenly taken back into favour, as if it were tacitly agreed in the face of this new excitement that the past was to be forgotten.

"Ah, Di," her father said, looking round and speaking pleasantly, "I was coming to fetch you. This is something for you to see—something for you young people to remember."

"I remember when Queen Isabella was driven away," said Miss Piper, coming forward with her little contribution to the talk, "and Queen Christina, you remember her, don't you, Major Gibbs? Dear Robert had such a poor opinion of her. He used to say——"

"Yes, yes, *I* remember," said the major loftily, sweeping away these worthless reminiscences with a wave of his hand.

"You forget, my dear madam, that I am the oldest English inhabitant of Madrid. I was here before any of you. I've seen you all come, all of you."

"Oh, you have had fine privileges!" cried Philippa. "What a great deal of history you must have seen."

"A little, a little; I could tell you some things." The soldier pursed his lips and drew himself up.

"What I used to wish most for was that I had lived in the days of the French Revolution."

"Philippa, I am horrified!" cried her mamma. "Think of the martyred king!"

"Oh, but he lost his head before they took it off, as somebody says. I don't want anything to happen to Di's king; but if they call this a revolution it ought to be a real one, and not a sham. Why don't they sing the 'Marseillaise?' They have no spirit, and there ought to be tumbrils thundering over the streets."

"My dear Miss Philippa!" cried Miss Piper aghast.

"They won't touch the crowned heads here," said Felix reassuringly. "Amadeo will go off comfortably with a first-class ticket to Italy, and they will put a Republic in his place, and nobody will know the difference."

"I don't know," said Philippa; "I think it is cruel of you to deprive me of a new emotion in that matter-of-fact way. Come here, Di, and look down and tell me if those faces don't belie his words."

Di went forward silently. It was a very quiet throng that she looked down on—a sombre crowd, hardly relieved by any touches of colour. The faces were for the most part turned towards the House of Congress, where a momentous debate was going on. It was strange to think that there, a stone's throw off, behind those walls a nation's fate was hanging in the balance.

For a moment no one spoke, and the scratching of Ralph's pen was very audible. The people—a wide sea of them, stretching as far as eye could reach up and down the broad street—were very patient and undemonstrative, but underneath this quiet exterior, turbulent passions lay hidden, which any moment might set free. It was impossible not to think a little seriously of the issues of the next few hours.

Ralph suddenly threw down his pen and rose.

"I must go out," he said, gathering his papers hastily together. "Pray make yourselves as comfortable as you can. Felix"—he tossed him his keys—"you look after the ladies, will you, and get them something to eat. You'll have to forage for yourself, for old Anchel has absconded."

"All right; we'll look after ourselves."

"But will you not be in danger?" Philippa

asked. "I haven't Mr. Chester's sublime faith in the peaceable intentions of that crowd."

"Danger! no," said Ralph. But his smile was for the anxious look in Di's eyes. "I'll have to use my elbows, that's all. It isn't a moment to study politeness." He nodded to them all and left the room.

"Ah, he speaks lightly," said Mrs. Henshaw, shaking her head; "but I am not to be blinded. I am prepared for the worst, the very worst. My poor Philippa enjoys the excitement, she is so young; but I tell her we may return to a blighted, wrecked home." This sentence sounded so well that she repeated it, folding her gloved hands together. "I wanted to take refuge at the British Embassy, but Major Gibbs pointed out that this was nearer. I think, between ourselves, he is a little jealous of the impression we made on dear Lady Louisa," she whispered cautiously. "Very weak and silly, as you say, my dear Miss Piper, but I am indulgent to little weaknesses, and so we came here instead."

"Ah, he is always so kind, Mr. Malleson," said the little lady, glowing under this unusual mark of confidence. "I thought of him at once, he is so safe! I brought away the miniatures," she said, showing a little parcel under her cloak. "I have nothing else of any value. I urged Miss Barbara to fly with me. I'm sure they

could have brought Mrs. Gordon on a mattress, you know, or a shutter. Don't they carry people often on shutters? But she said it was cowardly to run away. She is very brave," she said with a sigh; "and then they have so much silver plate."

"I don't think it is brave to ignore danger," said her companion, as if she were uttering a moral truism. "There is Blake, now, she insisted on remaining behind, after she knew that we were safe. It is wonderful what an affection the dear woman has for me. I believe she would give up her life for mine if one did that sort of thing nowadays. Dear me! are the gentlemen going to desert us?"

"We will return, my dear madam; we will protect you," said the major gallantly, retreating behind Mr. Ouvry to the door as he spoke. "You have nothing to fear. You are safe under our care."

"Pooh!" said Felix to his companions at the window; "his valour won't be put to the proof. Look at the sky; there will be no barricades to-day."

"They say the Toledo gate is barricaded," said Di.

She looked up as she spoke. The early promise of the day had fled; the spring, too, had taken flight from this turbulent, passion-stirred city.

The sky above the crowd was dull and leaden; the air heavy with the promise of storm.

"It's the Duke of Torre they are afraid of, isn't it?" Felix asked. "He is too wise to stir till the sun shines. This gloom will quench his ardour. Who ever heard of a revolution prospering under an east-wind rain?"

"You want to go, too," said Philippa, turning to him. She had seen him cast wistful looks at the throng beneath. "Don't mind us; I know you are longing to be down there. A man is never happy unless he is in the very heart of every crowd that gathers. We can do without him—can't we, Di?"

"Oh yes."

"Well, if you are not afraid for five minutes," he said laughing. "You are sure you won't be uneasy?"

He looked at Di as he spoke, but it was Philippa who assured him that he would not be missed.

Di's thoughts were full of sad perplexity. She was dwelling much on the brave king for whom she felt so loyal a love; but she had thoughts to spare, too, for things that touched her more nearly. She felt a little hurt and sore. It seemed to her Mrs. Henshaw had no right to judge and to pardon her, to extend, or to withdraw her approval in this arbitrary fashion.

She had done her no wrong. Then Miss Barbara's words, never long absent, rushed back into her mind, and overwhelmed her with a burning sense of shame. She wished Felix had left her alone to the peace and solitude she had learned to prize; she wished at that moment fervently that his sunny presence had never crossed her path to make duty hard.

The girls stood for a little while without speaking, after he left them. They had seen him emerge in the street below, but had quickly lost him in the throng.

Presently Philippa laid her hands lightly on Di's shoulders. She shivered a little under the old familiar touch. "I could not do without you," Philippa whispered, bending her cheek down to the brown head. "I sent him to fetch you."

"You!"

After that one surprised word, Di said nothing at all for what to both seemed a long time. She could not bring herself to speak. Then she turned and looked up with clear grave eyes into Philippa's face.

"I never meant to harm you," she said.

"No, I know that."

"You may trust me—always," said Di, still simply and with perfect gentleness.

"Yes," said Philippa hastily; "and Di"—the blue eyes fell before the grey ones—"I ought

to tell you, whatever mamma may say, I have no real claim—— ”

“ Di, my dear, I have hardly spoken to you,” said Miss Piper, fluttering up ; “ not since that night. I thought you would think it so odd, my sitting all evening with a strange gentleman ; but he was a friend of Robert’s, you know. I wanted to tell you, but I lost sight of you among the dancers.”

“ It is a great pleasure to meet an old friend,” said Di smiling. “ I am glad you enjoyed yourself.”

“ It was most fortunate about the dress,” Miss Piper rejoined, in that mysterious undertone she loved to adopt. “ One would wish, of course, to make a good impression on an old friend of the family. I brought it with me for safety—pinned in towels. I hid it behind the sofa, you know, in case the gentlemen should think it an odd parcel, and ask what it was. Think if the mob should break into our houses ! I should not like a Spanish woman of the people to wear it and trail it on the streets.”

“ No, indeed,” said Di laughing ; “ but I hope it won’t come to that. Concha won’t let them steal any of my dresses, I know.”

“ We cannot tell, my dear, we are living in sad times. I was quite uneasy about you till Mr. Chester offered to go for you.”

"You should have come with us, Di; but we were whisked off by the impetuous major without a moment to think. We left Blake in a panic of packing."

"I overslept myself, that was how I was so late in hearing what everybody else knew." She did not add that she had lain awake through all the earlier hours of the night, too full of troubled thoughts to rest.

Felix was the first of the gentlemen to return. He came in laden with parcels, and wearing an air of triumph.

"Now, I call that clever," he said brightly. "I've only lost one. Let me see—hallo! the salad's gone, too! I can tell you it was a pretty scrimmage—like running a blockade."

"And now we are ready to stand a siege," said Philippa, "to judge by the extent of your purchases."

"I was rather sceptical about old Ralph's larder, to tell the truth," he answered, laughing; "it is apt to be in the condition of Mother Hubbard's cupboard. Perhaps, if you wouldn't mind helping me, I'm not very skilful at laying out a table——"

"Di and I will be waitresses. You go and talk to mamma." She took Di's hand in her own. The close clasp seemed to seal in silence the words spoken and unspoken.

"Here come the gentlemen," said Mrs. Henshaw, from her post at the window, "and Mr. Malleeson, too. I wonder if he has brought us any news?"

But he had nothing new to tell. The debate, which had lasted stormily through many hours, was still going on; the royal colours still floated over the palace.

"Some lunch? That's right. This sort of thing makes one hungry," said Ralph. "Why, Felix, I didn't know I was so rich." He surveyed the well-filled table with surprise. "And flowers, too!"

"Hear him!" said Felix derisively. "Why, man, you had nothing but some tinned soup in your precious larder!"

"Well, we may as well have it hot," Ralph answered philosophically. "Give me that knife, and I'll open the cans. Won't that fire burn, Di? Let me try; I'll show you the shifts a forlorn bachelor is put to." He lifted a newspaper from the table, and held it before the grate.

"It is burning now; take care you don't set the paper on fire. Ralph," she said softly, looking up at him as she knelt on the rug, "do you think he will really go?"

"It is only a question of hours; his star has set."

"Why must it be?"

"He would break his coronation oath if he stayed."

"Then it is right? I am glad," she said with kindling eyes.

"Yes, your hero has come out of it very well, Di," he said, smiling at her earnest face. "Nothing in his reign becomes him like the laying down of his sceptre. He has done the only thing a manly man could do. He knows when he is beaten."

"Then he is a true king!" she said proudly.

It was wonderful how glad this little talk made her, how it lifted her for the time above her own little vexations. She was proud of her hero, as Ralph had called him. It mattered less what that knot of men there behind those silent walls, should do or decree, since he—her king—had done what was right.

It was a lively meal, in spite of the cloud that might be hanging over their heads, ready to burst at any moment. Malleson, restless and excited, went off again after a hurried mouthful, but Felix acted host to perfection, and waited gaily on them all. He could not but notice the pleased light on Di's face. What had happened to make her so glad, he wondered a little wistfully. Philippa intercepted his glance.

"I know where Di has been hiding all this

time," she said. "I made her confess. She has been haunting the picture gallery."

"Very improving," said Mrs. Henshaw dryly.

"I should prefer the Atocha. There's nothing more disconcerting than the way the people in the paintings stare at you."

"It seems to me it is all the other way," Felix struck in; "and that there's something uncanny in the pains they take to avoid looking at you. There isn't a St. Sebastian among them all, though he is stuck full of arrows, who so much as claims your pity by a glance. The madonnas, of course, don't know of your existence. Bassano's people turn their backs on you."

"My chief wonder is, what they all do when we are gone," said Philippa. "Do they come down out of their frames and walk about, and discuss us and criticise our criticisms? What a queer sight it would be—Goya's peasants and thieves side by side with Titian's kings and Ribera's martyrs!"

"Equality and fraternity with a vengeance!"

Thus they talked, idly avoiding politics, unless it were the major, who had been silently busy with his knife and fork until now, and who proclaimed loudly his detestation of a beggarly Republic, and his adhesion to the Alfonsist party. "The place won't be fit for a person to live in," he said.

"Poor young man!" sighed Miss Piper. "To think that he should have to go, like Isabella and Christina. But Queen Christina, she was a wicked woman, I'm afraid."

"She was a fool, ma'am," said the major hotly. "Women ought to be debarred from occupying the throne."

"It would be the women who reigned all the same," said Philippa archly. "The wisest kings have always consulted their wives."

"They may reign and welcome," said the soldier, making her a fine bow, "so long as they don't govern."

Mr. Ouvry ate sparingly; he quoted Horace softly.

"Falernian, did you say?" Mrs. Henshaw asked graciously. "I don't know that kind of wine. Yes, let me just taste it. I'm afraid our dear Mr. Chester has been very extravagant."

"This is only Val de Peñas," said Felix with admirable gravity. "Let me fill your glass."

"It was so nice of you to remember the flowers." She turned to him with a smile on her handsome lips. "If I have a weakness it is for flowers, especially in winter."

"They are rather poor, don't you think?" he answered, looking doubtfully at the spring blossoms. "I'd like to have got better ones

(Di had arranged them), but I thought myself in luck to get any to-day. I expected to find the market deserted; but patriotism goes for nothing, seemingly, when there is a chance of making a bargain. I believe a Spaniard would haggle with you over an ochavito if he were dying."

"I think your flower-seller was quite right," said Philippa, looking up—there was a touch of gay defiance about her to-day—"kings and queens seem to be cheap here, and one must live."

"Kings, eh?" Major Gibbs grew purple in the face. "Alfonso is the only legitimate heir to the throne. As for that prating demagogue over there——" But the things the major found to say about the brilliant orator, who was perhaps at that moment swaying the hearts of all who listened to him within the white walls of the Cortes, are too dreadful to be recorded.

They all rose, as if by one impulse, from the table, when this muttering thunder ceased for a moment. The major's cheeks were a deep, dull red; his hand shook as he poured himself out a glass of wine. Little Miss Piper shivered with maidenly horror at the robust, unvarnished language in which he clothed his sentiments.

Mrs. Henshaw, who felt herself to be playing

the part of hostess, looked in front of her with a neutral gaze. Di glanced at her father. He was tracing the pattern of the table-cloth absently with a delicate finger-tip. There was a smile, perhaps a little lofty and contemptuous, about his well-cut lips; he was a man whose opinions it was difficult to arrive at, since he knew very well the value of silence. Malleson had a way of saying, with a shrug, that when you did get at them you were hardly rewarded; you found them tepid, and about as palatable as cold tea. Whatever his political creed may have been, he did not choose to avow it, and the angry soldier had the field to himself.

He had now, by some occult process, arrived at the Peninsular war, and was delivering a panegyric on British valour. Everybody was relieved when Felix, taking advantage of a momentary pause, proposed that they should go out and see how matters were progressing. There were always some scraps of intelligence to be gleaned at the street corners or the cafés.

"Oh, take me with you," cried Philippa, starting up. "I see ever so many women in the crowd. I'll carry old Anchel's basket, if you like. I'll tie my head up in a handkerchief, like a woman of the people."

Suiting the action to the word, she unloosed

a blue silk scarf that she wore, and, folding it cornerwise, knotted it under her chin.

"Now, isn't the disguise complete? Behold me, Citoyenne Philippa!"

"Perfect," said Felix. "Are you prepared to take the consequences?"

"Nonsense! Philippa," said her mamma sharply. "You know you can't go out. Take that handkerchief off."

"There really is no danger. It may be a little rough for a lady, perhaps; but, as for danger——" Mr. Ouvry lifted his delicate eyebrows with a supercilious smile.

"Now, mamma, do you hear? When Mr. Ouvry says it, you will believe. If it had been you, you know," she said confidentially to Felix, "I should never have been allowed to go. We are too young; and to be young is to be at once set down as foolish and indiscreet. But when age and wisdom side with you——"

"All right, I hope you'll win. And I'll take care that you have a good time of it. We might smuggle you into the café, I dare say. They are doing a splendid trade there to-day."

"Let her go," said the major suddenly, presenting himself as a new ally. "If that rascal gets his way, etc., etc."

But, while he was speaking, Felix had gone

across the room to the window where Di was standing alone, a little apart.

"You will go with us?" he asked, and his voice was anxious and pleading. "If you will trust me, I will take the greatest care. There is no danger, and, as your father says, it is a thing to see."

"No," she said, shrinking a little within the shadow of the curtain, "thank you, I'd much rather stay here."

He turned away disappointed.

When Philippa willed anything she generally secured it; and permission was at length given her to go with the gentlemen, but not as a "woman of the people."

"Are you not coming, Di?" said her father, looking from one girl to the other. "It might amuse you, my child."

"No, father. I—I am tired," she said, hoping that he would not be disappointed. "And you will come back to take me home. You will be quite sure to come back, padre?"

Certainly, he would return, he assured her; in an hour or two, at most, it would be quite an easy matter to cross the square.

"I am not so sanguine," said Mrs. Henshaw, when they had all left. "I am prepared for the worst. It is right to look things calmly in the face; and the major is a man of large

experience. One puts less weight, you know, on a civilian's opinion. Still, I trust our young friends may be right for war, civil war, is a dreadful thing."

"I think the major is very coarse. Such expressions! He quite alarmed me."

Miss Piper was still blushing and quivering under the angry soldier's thrusts.

"One needs to understand the military manner," said Mrs. Henshaw instructively. "My great-uncle was a distinguished officer—our family has always taken high rank in the profession. I had a cousin, too. He was a colonel in the Indian army, and such a handsome man!"

"The Pipers have always chosen the Church. My brother Robert——"

"Ah! yes, so I have heard." Mrs. Henshaw civilly stemmed this stream of reminiscences at the outset. "If you will excuse me, my dear Miss Piper, I think I will lie down for a little. I dare say Mr. Malleson's sofa is very hard; but one must not grumble. And one cannot tell in what dreadful way one's rest may be disturbed before long. I cannot be so hopeful as others."

While she lay in dignified repose, Di busied herself in softly removing the remains of the meal. It gave her pleasure to set the room in

fair order, and to restore something of the look of home to the forlorn, untidy bachelor quarters. Ralph's ornaments were few — some trifles picked up in the Rastro, and one or two relics of a long-forgotten home in England, were tossed about among the books and papers in careless confusion. There was an immense array of pipes, which she dusted with care. She looked at the scattered papers with great respect. What fine things was not Ralph perhaps at this moment writing for the benefit of the English people, who would receive the great news printed in big capitals, with their coffee and toast next morning. She felt herself envying those English readers for whom Ralph's pen was supposed to be flying, while all the time that young man was offering libations to the new Republic, with his brethren of the press in the Café Fornos.

“I am only shutting my eyes. I am not asleep, my dear, if you wish to talk to me,” Miss Piper whispered from her corner.


Di looked at her old friend with a smile. She was nodding and recovering herself with a start; then again her meek head, with its wonderful garland of faded flowers, would droop upon her breast. Di went on tiptoe and fetched an ancient, battered cushion, that Ralph was wont to thump when he wanted to be very

emphatic, and put it gently behind the sleeper. She drew down the blind. The shadows were lengthening, and the room was dark.

When her task was finished, she went to the window and knelt down, leaning her forehead against the pane. The day was grey and bleak, but the threatened rain had not fallen. She was so high above the crowd, still standing patient in close ranks, that she could distinguish no individual sounds, only an indistinct, continuous murmur. Both ladies slept, and there was great stillness in the room.

Di gave herself up to thoughts that were sad as the sombre, brooding sky. Her imagination hovered about the palace, about the sick queen, and her laughing, unconscious children; the king who had failed to govern, and who was brave enough to own that he had failed. Her heart was stirred as she thought of it—the pain and the sacrifice, the renunciation of cherished hopes. She seemed to understand it all so well to-day—to hold the key to all suffering in her hand. For had not she, too, abdicated, given up that which might have been her crown and kingdom?

“I could have learned to love him, too,” she whispered. She shut her eyes, and for a little while the crowd outside was forgotten—the banished king preparing sadly for departure—



while she took farewell of a dream that promised to be sweet. It was only a moment's lingering about the threshold of a life that might have been, but was not to be, for she had given her word. "You may trust me," she had said, and she meant it wholly.

Perhaps she slept, for one sleeps through the keenest grief when one is young. At least, she came back with a great start to this work-a-day world. The room was perfectly dark, but there invaded it suddenly a great hoarse sound of shouting. She sprang up bewildered. Then the door opened, and some one cried out, "What! all in the dark?" And there was laughter and some confusion while a light was struck, and the ladies were discovered protesting indignantly that they had not slept.

Malleson was there, and Felix. Philippa tossed off her hat.

"There was nothing to see. It was a dreadful scramble, that was all. Listen. They are shouting again."

"What is it, padre? What has happened?" Di went over to him and took him by the arm.

"The Republic is proclaimed. That is their way of expressing satisfaction."

"And Don Amadeo, he will hear them. Oh, how cruel and fickle they can be!" she said indignantly.

"He'll be busy packing; he won't hear them. The major isn't here, is he? Felix looked round with an air of comic relief. "Won't his rage be colossal!"

"A Republic! Dear me! It will be like America."

"Mrs. St. John will patronize us, mamma," said Philippa, with a laugh. "She will tell us how to behave. Since things are settled, we can go home, and relieve poor Blake, if you like."

"Settled!" cried Mrs. Henshaw, unwilling to be driven in this unceremonious fashion from her Cassandra-like attitude. "I think the danger has only just begun. Don't you hear the noise they are making?"

"They are dispersing all the same," said Felix, shutting the window. "The street will be clear in a few minutes. "It is the tamest affair to call a revolution. You'll have to do a lot of padding to make anything of it, Ralph."

"You boys know so much. You had better try your hand at it," said Ralph grimly.

"We might draw up a sensational account among us. I've heard it profanely hinted that fiction and journalism are not distantly related. Miss Henshaw, will you lend us your imagination?"

Philippa shook her head.

"My spirits have been too much lowered. I wish I had stayed with you, Di. I think we had better go home and unpack our clothes, mamma, unless Blake has sent them off already."

"No, you really must not go," said Ralph energetically. "You must all stay and have some tea. Let us pledge the Republic in a social cup. You don't know what a pleasure it is to me to have company, or you would not grudge me this last hour."

And thus this eventful day ended.

* * * * *

It might be a tame thing as revolutions go, but Di thought there was another word that could be better applied to it as she sat looking out on the Puerta.

The Republic was twenty-four hours old. It was known to every one now how, early in the morning that sad little procession had gone out from the palace to return no more. The sick queen, surrounded by her weeping ladies, carried in the king's arms to the carriage; he himself—Di's *ré galantuomo*—brave, calm, uncomplaining to the last. It was impossible to hear the touching story of fallen royalty unmoved.

There was a great illumination in the plaza; lights quivered and danced in every window, on the faces of the animated, laughing people, on the arms of the militia picketed at every

corner. The mists of yesterday had passed, a little wind had risen, driving away the clouds, and fluttering the republican banner that rose bravely from the Home Office; there were bright-coloured colgoduras hanging from every balcony—each householder vied with his neighbour in this sort of finery—laughter and music, and the glitter of arms, while the Italian fugitives were far away on the distant frontier.

“Ah,” said Mr. Ouvry, coming up behind his daughter, and glancing over her shoulder, “Le roi est mort; vive le roi!”

CHAPTER XII.

“And, therefore, if to love can be desert,
I am not all unworthy.”

THERE is a certain order of mind that finds a great satisfaction in proving its instincts and forewarnings to have been right.

This pleasure Mrs. Henshaw enjoyed in a large measure during the early days of the young republic. It was undoubtedly an uncomfortable time for those who love order; who do not care to be agitated by continual hints of near trouble, and who like to have their letters and papers served with their morning coffee.

Each day brought fresh outbreaks of the social distemper that everywhere invaded the unhappy country. Mr. Malleson might laugh in his scornful way, but the papers were full of realistic details; and did he mean to say the press deliberately lent itself to falsehood?

“I write for the papers myself,” Ralph an-

swered, with a smile of which the lady could make nothing. She clung with a firmness worthy of a better cause to her pessimism—the country was going to ruin. It was a bold, a delightfully dangerous experiment to continue to live in it.

She patched up a formal peace with Deonys, and got the girl to come each evening to the gilded salon and translate the sensational paragraphs of the *Imparcial*. Santa Cruz was the villain of the hour. Horrible atrocities were attributed to this young *cura*, who was a hero to the red-capped Carlists in the north. Mrs. Henshaw thrilled with a kind of delicious horror at every new whisper of disaster.

“I think Mr. Malleson will scarcely decline to believe that there is danger now,” she said significantly one evening. “Two hundred and thirty soldiers deserted from the barracks yesterday, and ran out to join the Carlists—*two hundred and thirty*, do you hear, Philippa? and Santa Cruz is said to be in the neighbourhood. I forget the name of the place, but quite near. We may be murdered in our beds any night. And this note from Mrs. Baird-Brown, you see, is more than three weeks old—delivered by a policeman, too! When things come to this pass, I think it shows a sad levity of mind to deny the peril we are in.”

“You had better keep the envelope, mamma;

it is what you call documentary evidence. We can produce it, if people at home are rude enough to doubt our sufferings."

"You may laugh, Philippa; but I trust you may live to see your country again."

"I won't break my heart if I don't!"

"Major Gibbs was here when you were out, and he tells me it would be madness to risk a journey to the north. 'If you are anxious to be shot, you can go,' he says in his forcible way. And, with the lines cut, really I don't see how we can travel by rail."

Philippa laughed.

"We don't want to lose our heads just yet," she said, "that would be too much of a sensation. I shouldn't mind a little gentle imprisonment, but the red-caps don't sanction half measures, it seems. We must content ourselves with slipping out in safety by the south, as we always intended. 'Discretion is the better part of valour,' as the copy-books tell us."

"For myself," said Mrs. Henshaw, "I have no fear. I have never been accused of cowardice, though I may have many other failings; but I have to think of you, my child. Your safety must come first, at any personal inconvenience or expense. It will cost a great deal more; but we shall have the protection of our friends. It is perhaps wise to yield."

"We always proposed to go home that way, at least since Mr. Chester decided to take that route," Philippa answered, turning away. This kind of talk never deceived her, and she hated herself that she could not be deceived. There were times when she felt the saddest envy of Di's unquestioning, child-like faith in her father, of her pride in this cold, bland gentleman's every word and look. She could not remember an hour when she had not been able easily to pierce the flimsy drapery of high motive in which her mother clothed deeds and acts that were not noble. She had wished ardently for blindness, but she had never herself striven to reach the clear light in which things that are false cannot dwell. Her protests had only taken the form of undutifulness; and it was her punishment that she stood aside helpless, feeling herself slowly doomed to inescapable smallness of aim, and with hardly an impulse to set herself free.

While civil war was agitating the land, spring advanced with steady foot, and brought a brief interval of rare beauty to the brownness of the plain that flows round the city like a sea.

There is something of the breeziness and the loneliness of the ocean, of its large and peaceful quietude, in this wide stretch of undulating

land where you may walk for miles in silence unbroken except by the singing of the larks that rise at your very feet. The sun, so pitiless in summer, is in the short, swift spring tempered and genial, but strong enough to bring out in full relief the vivid green of the young grain, and the sad silver of the olives.

In so liberal a space of sky and earth there is room for much subtle change of light and shade, for vast expanse of sunset colour, tawny yellow, and orange. Di climbed up the steep Calle Ancha, and looked at it often from Mrs. Gordon's window.

She made her peace with Miss Barbara in those days.

"I meant no harm," she said, looking up into the older woman's face from her low seat near her friend's sofa.

"Well, I'm not one to keep up anger, we'll let bygones be bygones," said Miss Barbara, softened, perhaps, by a certain appealing look on the girl's face. "I only spoke to you for your good, but maybe I was too quick with my tongue."

Mrs. Gordon asked no questions; she was one of those restful women who seem to understand without being told.

"I am going away, you know," said Di, looking at her with her grave smile, "and I

couldn't let Miss Barbara be angry with me till I come back."

"Perhaps you will take us into your confidence then, Deonys," said Miss Barbara, unable to resist the last prompting of offence. "You'll remember that we were your mother's friends; Mrs. Gordon and me, and not Miss Piper. It doesn't become a young girl to forget old friends, and Miss Piper was never within your mother's door."

"She won't forget." Mrs. Gordon smiled at her. "Di's heart is big enough to hold us all."

"It isn't pretty in young people to be secretive," Miss Barbara went on, waxing a little angry at this too light way of meeting her remonstrance; "and if Deonys has anything to tell, we are the people that ought to hear it. No, Mary, I know what I am talking about; and I think girls ought to take advice, and not to fancy they are fit to judge for themselves. It would be only respectful to consult us."

"I have nothing to tell," said Di, sitting up and looking bravely into Miss Barbara's eyes. The hot colour swept like a fire across her cheek and brow, but her glance was steady. "I am going to England. I didn't want to go, but I think it will be a good thing to get away, far away, if you can think such things, that

I could forget you, mamma's old friends. And—and——" she broke down and faltered—"there is nothing to tell, except that I am going away."

"Well, well, you will maybe have some news for us when you come back." Miss Barbara hinted with dignity that she knew more than she cared to reveal. "And as for Miss Piper, poor silly body, I don't grudge your being kind to her; but, since you are such friends, I think you might make her wear gowns that are liker her years."


"Come, Barbara, who was preaching respect a moment ago?"

"There's a way of saying things that gives no offence," said Miss Barbara loftily; "and if Amelia Piper behaves like a girl she must expect to be treated like one."

But Di thought she knew of no road to reach the old place in Miss Barbara's esteem. It was, after all, but a disappointing truce. She felt vaguely sore and hurt at all her little world at this time. The visit to England, dreaded before, began to take the shape of a hope. She was longing for the refuge of indifferent eyes and unfamiliar faces. She did her best to be alone, and escaped visitors with some skill. She had to content herself in these troubled times with shorter rambles than in other years; but

the city itself was as safe under the red and purple of the republican colours as in the days of a constitutional monarchy, and there are hidden within it one or two corners where he who so wills can be alone with the wide earth and sky.

There is the old Florida, shabby, given over to slow decay, but sweet with a carpet of early violets, its formal, forlorn alleys green and solitary. The convent is deserted, too, and when you have passed the farm there is hardly a sign of life. You may wander over sandy roads that creep and twist and cease suddenly, as if they had lost heart and were too tired to go further. At the end of one long lane there is an old half-ruinous archway—a bit of rare colour, with its delicate mosaic of moss and lichen, that Di always made the limit of her walk. It is stranded in a neglected corner, and serves no present use, but the flowers grow gratefully under its shadow. When she had gathered all of these that she cared to carry, she turned homewards. Of late, she had given up her study of the gallery (Felix, and even Mrs. Henshaw, had taken to revisiting it), and contented herself with homelier pictures. Spring warmth brings out all the gladness of the southern nature, and it is impossible not to sympathize with the gaiety of the people. You see all



sorts of "interiors" as you peep into the *patios*, round which the tall houses are built. There is a great frankness in the life of the poor; the *braseros* are kindled, the meals prepared, the babies swaddled before your eyes; a girl combs her long black hair while she chatters to a neighbour leaning over a balcony; the rustic, ardent love-making, too, the quick consent, the vows that fall so hot from the lips—you may share this also if you choose. There was one courtyard at the entrance to which Di sometimes lingered to buy fruit of a wrinkled, quick-eyed old woman. It was a brighter court than others, with a great red fountain in the middle, and a narrow, formal garden, where, at times, the landlady herself was to be seen walking gorgeous as a sunflower in trailing silk. On the whole, there were many things to make these solitary walks pleasant, in spite of troubled thoughts.

Philippa was busy with a round of last gaieties; her time was, indeed, much in demand, since there were idle *attachés* to be entertained in all languages. Mrs. Henshaw's afternoon tea-table was graced no longer by Major Gibbs alone; and that bluff soldier found the ladies less charming than before. There were balls and concerts and theatres in the evening, and with so many attractions it was hardly a matter

of surprise that Philippa found little room for the claims of friendship.

"I shall be glad when we have left it all behind, and have fled to the south together," she said one evening, when she had snatched a moment to run upstairs.

"But you like it, don't you?" said Di. "How many have you had to-day, Philippa?"

"Oh, I don't know. The count, of course, and little Mr. Meyers, and Herr von Rosen."

"His Majesty the People is now king," said Ralph, who had sauntered in. "Rival courts are forbidden, Queen Philippa."

"Our salon isn't a court"—she turned to him with a smile—"it's a cave of Adullam, rather; a refuge for the bored and the *blasé*. If you knew how difficult it is to keep peace among them. It's all Mr. Meyer's length of upper lip, I believe."

"What has that got to do with it?"

"Oh, somebody once told him it was a sign of sagacity, and he has been trying to be wiser than the rest of us ever since. We don't like people who are cleverer than ourselves; and besides, it's a sham sort of cleverness: you hear him dragging it out of himself as he talks. You never come to see us now, Mr. Malle-son."

"I am afraid of your ears. You would be

listening for the creaking of my internal machinery, too."

"No, I shouldn't. To prove it, I want to ask you something. Will you go to the south with us?"

"You may take Felix," he answered; "he's an idle youth. You may snub him if he is too clever. I give you leave."

"I believe he means to go," she answered, with a shade of petulance. "Granada doesn't belong to me. I can't prevent him paying it a visit if he likes."

"That is very generous of you. I hope you won't forbid his going to Cadiz, too, and taking a passage for England. I've had about-enough of the young man."

"I don't think he is going home with us," she said, looking at him quite steadily. "There is a great deal for him to see here yet, and he isn't travelling for mere frivolity, like us," she said, with her frank smile. "He's travelling with a note-book."

"I've taken care of that," said Ralph, gravely. "I've an immense respect for that note-book. I've sent him off to Toledo just now with Dr. Carter. You don't know Carter? he's an epitome of all the ologies, and the Moorish invasion is his battle-horse. I expect by the time you are ready to go to Granada young

Felix will have had about enough of Toledo in particular, and antiquities in general, so you see you can accept his escort with an easy conscience."

"I have nothing to do with his movements," she said, almost coldly. "And all this is beside the question. I asked you to go with us. Mr. Ouvry is going, too."

"If I go it will be to look after Di; to see that she behaves herself," he said, looking across at her and meeting her answering glance. She had not spoken all this time.

"Yes, of course," she said. It seemed to her quite natural that he should look after her. Had he not taken care of her all her life?

"I want to be looked after, too," Philippa said, rising to go. She spoke lightly, but there was an unexpected look of wistfulness in her eyes, grave as they rarely were. It was almost as if she were making an appeal to be delivered from herself.

"That would be too much responsibility for one poor pair of shoulders. I find Miss Di more than I can manage."

"Very well," she said, with an odd sparkle in her eyes. "I warn you, you may regret not accepting my meek offer of submission. After this I shall feel free to do just as I like."

"Is it a declaration of war?" he said half mockingly, as he held the door open for her. "Thank you for warning me." He made her a grave bow.

"That is a strange girl," he said musingly, after she had left him. "I wonder if, after all——"

"What, Ralph?"

"Oh, nothing," he said carelessly; "and, besides, I can't always be playing Mentor to his Telemachus. That's about as coherent as one of Mrs. Henshaw's speeches, isn't it, Di? So you are really going to England under her wing?"

"Yes, I couldn't travel alone, I suppose? and the father can't go with me. Poor old padre! I don't like going to a country where he was so unhappy. I can't forgive England that."

"But you will like it," he said, skimming easily away from the dangerous ground of Mr. Ouvry's unhappiness. "London is the ninth wonder of the world."

"My cousin Bell doesn't know Mrs. Henshaw, I think," she said slowly.

"You don't know everybody in London," he smiled. "It's a collection of villages. You only know your own particular acquaintances."

"Is Kensington near Brompton?"

"Near enough for you to miss each other as often as you like."

"I don't want to miss Philippa." She looked at him reproachfully.

"Well, I shouldn't mind so very much."

"But you don't like her; I wish you did."

"Do you?" he said indifferently. "Then I'll try; it ought not to be so very difficult. You go on the principle of the French proverb, 'Qui aime Bertrand aime son chien.'"

"I don't think you are nice to her."

"You think me very intolerant?" He tossed back his hair. "Tolerance is good enough in its way; but it may be bad enough, too. When it is a question between right and wrong, between honour and dishonour, truth and falsehood, it is time to fling tolerance——"

He paused, for it appeared that Di was impertinently smiling at him.

"I know," she said meekly. "But don't fling it all away; keep a little scrap for Philippa and me, unless you mean any of these ugly insinuations for us. I wish you would speak less grumpily to Philippa—it would be good for her; she would listen to you."

"Would she?" he said with mock alarm; "but that might be dangerous. What if Felix took to horsewhipping me next—eh, Di?"

Perhaps she did not hear his badinage. She

was looking out of the window. When next she spoke it was to say, entreatingly—

“You will go to Granada with us?”

“I will join you there, at least, if I can't start with you. You are sure your father means to go?”

“Oh yes,” she said simply; “he has been speaking to Mrs. Henshaw about it, and about my going with her to London. I don't think she likes it much. I'm in disgrace with everybody just now—Miss Barbara, too, like poor Miss Piper. Only you and the padre are contented with me.”

“You won't be long together, you know,” he said, more disturbed than he cared to show. “It's a short voyage; and in London you will have other friends. I want you to be often with my sister-in-law. She's a good little woman, and you will understand each other and get on famously over the babies.”

“Oh, I should like that,” she said eagerly; “the babies will be the greatest comfort. Bell is very sensible; and I'll disappoint her, I know.”

“Well, you won't find Lady Malleson too sensible, I promise you.”

“I'm afraid everybody will be so clever.”

“Like Mr. Meyers?”

“You don't like very sensible people, do you, Ralph?”

"I adore stupidity."

"That's why you like me, I suppose?" She looked at him with a laugh. "You are very good to me on the whole, but everybody won't be like you and the padre."

"If they worry you over there you can always come back to the old home, you know."

"Don't say it like that! Don't you know I'll be counting the days till I get back again? Oh, Ralph! surely *you* don't think that I can change and forget old friends?" she said reproachfully.

"I am not afraid of your forgetting."

He looked at her with his grave kind eyes—a look that puzzled her. She went up to him and laid her hand on his sleeve.

"You may be quite sure I'll never forget," she said earnestly.

CHAPTER XIII.

“Ich bin zu alt um nur zu spielen,
Zu jung um ohne Wunsch zu sein.”

MRS. HENSHAW spoke much of her return to England, but as yet she had fixed no date for her departure. She felt it to be a hard necessity rather than a pleasure to turn her back on a country that had treated her well. The English colony in Madrid had treated her very well. It had received her without question, and made her welcome to share its pleasures. True, for all purposes of insight into the national life of the country, she might as well have lived in Paris, or Florence, or Geneva. No Spanish door had been open to her; and of local customs and manners she had learned as little as any passing tourist. But she easily persuaded herself that this was no loss.

“They are all Roman Catholics, you know—if, indeed, they are *anything*, my dear,” she confided, in writing, to her friend, Mrs. Baird—

Brown. "And think of the risk to my Philippa!"

Philippa, indeed, was in no danger, in spite of her many conquests. She was gracious and pleasant to all; but there was a touch of hardness about her at this time that was, perhaps, her truest safeguard. When poor Mr. Meyers, forgetting to be wise, put his feelings into words that were as foolish as the ravings of most wooers, he found that the lady of his choice could be cold and almost cruel.

"Why did you tell him we let our house?" said Mrs. Henshaw complainingly; "it sounds so bad."

"It sounds true. Why should he think we are richer than we are?"

"Since you were refusing him, you might have let him believe what he liked. Explanations of that kind are in such bad taste. And to say that we had no position or fortune!"

"It is quite true, mamma. I would say it to them all to-morrow, if it would keep them away. I don't want them to talk to me. I hate when people make love to me," she said vehemently, for the time fully believing what she said. "Oh, mamma, let us go away—let us go by ourselves," she said, moved to rare entreaty. "Let us go somewhere where nobody knows us—where we can begin again."

"We are going soon, dear," said her mother soothingly, "whenever we can be ready. You know your new dresses have not come home yet; but Blake can begin our packing some day, if you wish it so much."

"Let me begin now," said Philippa eagerly. She lifted a little ornament as she spoke. They had gathered many knickknacks about them, and offerings from Philippa's knights had not been wanting.

"Must we take all these things home with us? Well, I shall pack them myself. You know, mamma, I'm a far better packer than Blake."

"Yes, dear child, but you forget that this is Mrs. Cross's day at home, and we promised to go. Indeed it is quite time to get ready. You shall dismantle the room when we come back, and I won't say a word, though I think there is nothing so uncomfortable as sitting in a room stripped of all its ornaments. It is really almost like being half-dressed."

She was not alarmed. She knew that the hot vehemence of this mood would pass the more quickly because it was an alien mood. Philippa knew it too. She turned away listlessly. Already the little spring of desire to live cleanly and act truly had died away. She was her brightest self, the centre and the life of Mrs.

Cross's reception, and she spoke no more of flight.

Mrs. Henshaw did not remind her of her haste to be gone. It was only necessary to keep the unhappy Mr. Meyers, who made Philippa irritable by his wretched looks, out of sight, and a little skill accomplished that. The unfortunate suitor's absence secured, all seemed to go well. The drawing-room ornaments were allowed to remain, and no further hint of packing was given. Mrs. Henshaw herself was well content to linger. Her social position was better here than she could ever hope to make it in London; and there was no charm in the thought of returning to a house that had been given over to the mercy of strangers. She knew very well what that meant. There was the wrangle with the agent over the inventory; the dispute with the late occupiers about the worn carpets, damaged furniture, and cracked tea-cups; then, when her dispersed household gods had been regathered, there followed that dreary campaign—that struggle for place and recognition that makes the London season a daily-fought battle to so many women. It was not to be wondered at that she was in no haste to renew the combat, while she could command the pleasures of conquest at a lesser price.

Thus, the homeward journey might have been

deferred to the Greek calends, but for the heat which came with a sudden stride in the late spring, and for the danger which, real or imaginary, was made the most of by the daily press. Now and again, as on the last day of Carnival, when the fooling was at a height, a panic seized the whole city; rumour swept like a wind through the streets, and cleared them as if by magic.

Mrs. Henshaw went home with trembling limbs, and began the long-delayed packing forthwith. A few more experiences of a "corrido" settled the matter. All her former dread returned unsupported by the old delightful thrills; her heroism vanished. It became a solemn duty to leave a capital threatened alike without and within. The dull respectability of the Brompton house took the shape of a refuge.

"For the sake of our friends we must be prudent," she would say. "And it is not as if we were going alone; that would be too sad." When this remark was made to Felix, he knew that he was expected to escort the ladies back to London, but for once a ready reply failed him. His going or remaining depended on many things that were not within Mrs. Henshaw's ken.

Early in the glowing days of April marching orders were given. Di's wardrobe did not take


long to pack ; and she spent the hours that were left to her in making her farewells.

Miss Barbara's heart misgave her at the last moment. The stream of good advice flowed less copiously than usual. For once, the clan Gordon failed to point a moral. She contented herself with a great many questions put severely to hide the warmer throbbing of her love.

"Did you wrap up your new silk gown in silver paper, Deonys ? Two new gowns in a month ! It's a great piece of extravagance. I wonder what my mother would have said to it. I thought myself well off at your age when I got one of Martha's dresses turned and made up for my best. There was some stuff in a gown then to make it worth the turning. Nowadays nothing but new things will serve you young folks ; but what can you look for when people that should know better trick themselves out in satin ? "

"One does not go on a journey every day," said Mrs. Gordon, smiling at Di, who sat at her feet, her chin buried in two hands.

"I'm not grudging her the gowns, Mary," said Miss Barbara, with a little offended jerk of the head ; "but she may as well learn to take care of them. And you'll remember to pin up the strings when you take off your bonnet, Deonys, and wrap it in a clean handkerchief."



"Yes," said Di, who felt herself bound to give penitent heed to these last admonitions. "I'll only wear it on Sundays, you know. I don't need to tie up my chin more than once a week, do I?"

"Well, I hope it won't take your mind off the sermon. You'll never forget to go to church, though I hear that they have fallen into sad heathenish ways in England, making out that the Sabbath is ended after morning service. You had better take notes and send them once a week to Mrs. Gordon and me; it will keep you from thinking too much of your new clothes."

"Sunday will be the only bit of the week that will seem like home," said Di, with a little sigh. "They can't alter the service, at any rate."

"I dare say you'll be asked out a good deal," Miss Barbara went on, bent on supplying a code of manners to fit every emergency; "and I'm not saying you need refuse, though I hope you won't feel uplifted. You'll only wear your silk for very best, and your old white dress will do for tea parties. They won't ask a child like you to dinner, unless fashions are greatly changed. I'm not going to say anything about your behaviour, for I am sure you will never forget that you are your mother's daughter;

and if you are half as bonnie and as good, you'll do."

This was highly magnanimous, and Di was not without gratitude.

"Indeed, you may trust me," she said, with a sudden flush.

"I'm going to say nothing more; it would show a poor faith in our training if I was to be afraid. I think this is the time, Mary, to tell Deonys of our intentions. We may both be dead before she comes back. Your health is not much to boast of at any time; and, though I've the Gordon constitution——"

"Oh, don't speak like that!"

"We must all die," said Miss Barbara severely; "and I hope you are not silly enough, Deonys, to think that speaking of your will is going to bring your last day any nearer?"

"My will!" said Di, bewildered; "I've nothing to leave."

"But we have. You needn't always be thinking of yourself, child; no one was speaking of your will. It's as well to be prepared for everything; and I may tell you we have not forgotten you. It may be a comfort to you to remember it when you are among strangers."

"There isn't much to leave," said Mrs. Gor-

don, amused at the girl's perplexed face; "we are not going to make an heiress of you, Di."

"The Gordon plate is not to be despised, Mary," Miss Barbara spoke with lofty dignity; "though, as you are only one of us by marriage, you can't be expected to value it as I do. Deonys won't be the worse for some good, solid silver to set up housekeeping with—it's better than the trash people think so much of as marriage presents. But you must marry a good young man, you know, Di," she added, with grim good humour; "and somebody that Mrs. Gordon and I approve of. I can't have the family heirlooms pass into unworthy hands."

"I am not going to marry anybody," said Di, the hot colour mounting to her brow. "Oh, Miss Barbara, you are very kind; but, indeed, I'd rather you didn't think of me."

"Well, I suppose you'll want a teapot whether you marry or not?" she rejoined drily. "And I'm not going to put notions in your head—they'll come there soon enough. If you prefer earthenware, like that silly body, Miss Piper, who, for all her miniatures and her satin gowns, hasn't so much as a silver teaspoon to boast of, it's a very poor taste, that's all I can say."

"I shall like anything you care to give me—anything at all. You know that, don't you?"

said Di, springing up and putting her arms round Miss Barbara's stiff neck, to the derangement of her starched muslin handkerchief.

"Well, well, be a good bairn," she said, relenting under this caress. "And the tray is without a scratch—I will say that; there's never a teacup been put on it without a bit of waxcloth below."

A little depressed by so much good advice, and not elated by this hint of possible heirship, Di hailed Ralph Malleson's unexpected appearance with unfeigned delight. She had just left Miss Piper, who had also her word of timid maidenly warning to give to the girl who was going out into the wide, wicked world, peopled, in this lady's imagination, with processions of young men bent on enticing maidens to make the great experiment.

"Oh, Ralph!" she cried, "where did you spring from? I've been saying good-bye to everybody, and it's horrid."

"In that fatal word there breathes despair," said Ralph philosophically. "You don't propose that we should take farewell of each other, too, do you?"

"Not yet, if you are a good boy. You might take me for a little walk, it isn't very late; and very soon we shall have no chance of walks together."

"Then we had better go to the Florida; its melancholy wastes will be in keeping with our feelings."

"Come and see the mountains," she said comfortably slipping her arm into his. "I've been looking at them from Miss Piper's window; and, do you know, there is hardly a scrap of snow left anywhere—not more than 'a poor man's washing,' as Concha says. Have you been reading?" she asked, noticing that he carried a large volume. "Oh, I know," she added severely; "you've been reviewing it, you've been cutting it up!"

"Into mincemeat. Could you expect me to have mercy on a man who never 'begins' but always 'commences,' and who speaks of the immortal Velasquez as a 'talented painter?'"

"You ought to think of his feelings."

"He ought to consider mine. He hasn't spared me a line of his tediousness; this is only the half of his puerility. Let us be thankful publishers don't insist on three-volumed books of travels yet; this fellow would have been quite equal to the occasion, you can see with what reluctance he writes his *finis*."

"I won't let you see a word of my English diary," said Di, holding up her head and looking at him severely; "and it will be very good

indeed, because I'll have the advantage of all my cousin Bell's opinions."

"Come," said Ralph, with much apparent depression, "who is severe now? But you'll write to me sometimes? If you will promise to write, I'll let you off showing the diary, and that's a most magnanimous offer, since I'll lose all the benefit of Miss Bell's mature experience. You wouldn't be so frivolous as to put it in a letter, of course."

"Oh, yes, I'll write," said Di, growing melancholy at the thought of the separation involved in this promise. "And I want you to do some things for me, Ralph. I want you to go very often to see Miss Piper."

"You don't think there would be any danger—eh?"

"She trusts you," said Di, half remorseful at the smile she could not resist. "You couldn't ask her to tea, I suppose?" she continued doubtfully; "but you might go there—that would please her. And you could take some cakes with you; Concha will get them for you. You might say that you were very hungry, and it would be quite true, because you do like tea, you know."

"I might go without dinner, and then there would be absolute truth in the statement. Must I appear in a swallow-tail, and do you think she will put on the blue satin?"

"The blue satin for you? No, indeed! Oh, Ralph, do you know I think she starves herself." She looked up at him with all the laughter extinguished in her soft eyes. "And that greedy Mariquita eats so much." I found Miss Piper at dinner, and she told me that she had no appetite. She said the Pipers all ate sparingly; but she looked hungry, and I know she was saving for Mariquita's supper." Di always spoke earnestly when her thoughts were busy with this poor lady, the sole survivor of a long line.

"Don't you think the cousin—he of the silk trade—could be induced to come forward again?" Ralph offered the suggestion with a smile. "Why should he stop at a paltry gown? Now, if he were to propose a little sum annually—it's nothing to him, you know—and I dare say he was gratified to get that note from his kinswoman."

Di laughed.

"He managed very nicely that time," she said, "and Philippa kept the secret beautifully. Do you know Mrs. Henshaw went to call on Miss Piper the day after the ball?"

"The philosophy of clothes," said Ralph, calmly.

"It is very good of you, Ralph; but we mustn't think of it. She would find out, and

that would vex her. I don't think it matters so much about her being poor, if Miss Barbara would only forgive her—if you could bring that about?" She looked at him wistfully.

He shook his head.

"I will confess to you, Di, that I stand in awe of Miss Barbara. She snubs me. Ever since that affair of the silver plate she has looked on me as an indiscreet and frivolous youth, unworthy of trust."

"And the teapot is to be mine," said Di, laughing; "so if you let any one steal it while I am in England you will have to reckon with me."

Thus they chatted lightly while the golden afternoon spent itself. Spring, in this ripe land, does her work almost audibly. As you listen you seem to hear the grass-blades growing; the wind that rustles melodiously through the tree branches sets free an imprisoned bud at every breath; pulsing, palpitating life is everywhere about you.

Presently they both yielded to the spell, and ceased to talk. They were used to such pauses; their friendship did not need the support of perpetual speech, it could stand the test of silence. They had seated themselves on a stone bench in the gardens by the river. Above them the little palace stood on a ridge overlooking the

green avenues and the wider country beyond. There was a bit of mellow, crumbling wall near them; in and out of the loose masonry bright-eyed green lizards were darting. Deonys was watching them idly, with thoughts that wandered speculatively into the future, not without vague thrills of anticipated pleasure in spite of her reluctance to face it.

Ralph was not smoking, as was usual with him—he was conscious of a new and overmastering restlessness that made it difficult even to sit still. He got up once, and brought her a handful of flowers. She took them and began to weave them mechanically while he paced the path in front of her. That brief half-hour held one of the great struggles of life—the battles that are fought in silence, leaving to careless eyes no visible scar. It was so difficult to let her go and not to speak the words that had hovered on his lips so long. It was not the quick growth of a month or two; it was a love that was bound up with many years of his life—with all of it that belonged to his manhood. He remembered his hot youth, his voluntary renouncing of ambition, only as one remembers a fever dream. The awakening, the peace and strength of recovery, the reviving of hope, were all one with the thought of her. He recalled how, as a little unconscious child, she had com-


forted his sore and angry heart ; how with time she had but grown nearer and dearer. It was a love fed by many memories, acquiring every year "fresh strength and sanctity." It was hard to forbid it speech.

As he looked at her he felt the impulse fierce within him to go to her, to take the little brown hand so carelessly busy among the flowers, and to say to her—"Stay with me, do not go to England; let us begin a new life here, together."

He knew that she would let her fingers lie without trembling in his clasp; he knew her sweet, candid eyes would rest with perfect trust on his; that her lips would utter the consenting "yes" with hardly a moment's faltering pause. He could count on her old habit of affection, on her unwillingness to give pain, even on her deep desire to give him pleasure; but the treasure of her love—was that for him?

"When she comes back," he said to himself, reigning in the impetuous words that were eager to leap forth. The time to speak had not yet come. He counted much on her coming back. She might not like the great, busy world; she might feel lonely and miss him there. His thoughts were interrupted by her light laugh.

"Look here, Ralph," she said; "come and look at this?"



He came up, and stood for a moment in silence.

She was leaning with her arms on the back of the seat.

Behind, half hidden out of sight by the overgrown bushes, was an ancient statue, broken and defaced almost beyond recognition—a Hebe, perhaps, long ago robbed of her urn. This meek, weather-stained head Di had crowned with her flowers.

A sudden, whimsical fancy crossed his deeper thought, and he, too, laughed aloud. The worn face, with its fantastic adornment, reminded him of nothing so much as of Miss Piper.

"You are a very irreverent young woman," he said.

"Why irreverent? Isn't she a goddess? I am crowning her."

"Gods bereaved, gods belated,
Gods discrowned and desecrated,
Now, Pan is dead."

He spoke absently. "So they say, but I question it. He is hiding down there among the reeds, and when our backs are turned he will lift his head and look about him—then he will creep up here. Listen! don't you hear him piping?"

"I hear the wind and the water."



"And, I declare, Di, your ancient Hebe is smiling," he said. He had flung himself on the turf at her feet, and looked up at her lazily. "She hears him, at any rate."

"Nonsense," said Di, hitting him softly with a flower which she threw at him; "how could you smile if you had a broken nose and no lips to speak of?"

"I've heard of people smiling with a broken heart—that must be a more difficult feat."

"You don't believe in broken hearts?"

"Men have died and worms have eaten them—but not for love," he answered calmly. "Your sickly, sentimental people who think all is lost because their desire is denied them always seemed to me to be made of very flimsy, useless stuff. Duty is greater than happiness. It is the law of life for more of us than Goethe dreamed of perhaps, 'dass wir entsagen müssen.'"

His voice was hard. He was preaching this stern sermon to himself. She said nothing, but she shivered a little, and the flowers dropped from her fingers.

"Poor Hebe!" said Ralph, with a laugh, "your crown has come too late."

"Don't you believe in another life, Ralph; a life for people who fail here?"

"I know nothing. But, on the whole, if

there is not something a little less narrow and ignoble in front of us, I'd rather have been born a good while back. Say, in the age when the big lizards were masters of the world—the huge forefathers of that little fellow on the wall—before we had developed this opposable thumb which, according to Mr. Herbert Spencer, gave us the kingship over the beasts. How should you like to have been a big lizard, Di?”

“I shouldn't have had to go to London.”


“And I shouldn't have had to write an article on the political crisis. Newspapers were not in that happy age, nor ‘copy’ nor printers’ devils waiting at the door. But, as I am not a joyful care-free iguanodon, Di, understand that I must go home. Look, the sunlight has died off that wall already.”

“And it is our last walk,” she said, rising reluctantly, “until you come to England. You will take me walks in London, won't you?”

“If the powers that be don't forbid. Isn't Miss Bell a great stickler for propriety? She may object to my appropriating you.”

“I don't care what Bell thinks,” she said recklessly; “and I'll watch for you every day. You must come in this old velvet coat, Ralph, because then you will seem like a bit of home.”

“Miss Bell's footman might hesitate to admit me.”



"I'll let you in," she answered confidently. "I'll be looking out for you; and I don't think, besides, Bell is so grand as to have a footman."

He had quite mastered himself again. A little cynicism, not quite worthy perhaps, came to his aid, and he had all an Englishman's horror of any self-betrayal.

Man is a many-sided animal, and even his keenest emotion has dangerous rivals. He loved this girl well and truly. It was no mere fancy. He was, indeed, "too old to play"—too young to have outlived hope and desire. But love with the man is never, as sometimes with the woman, the one absorbing interest of life. His existence was not made up of tea-drinkings with elderly ladies, or of walks and talks with younger maidens. He had his work and his friendships—a whole world of occupations they could not share, of plans and desires they never dreamed of. For the rest he could wait. The only thing he had learned well was this lesson of waiting. It seemed, when he came to think of it calmly, something less than honourable to claim a promise from her—and he knew she would promise—to bind her to himself and to his poor fortunes, before she had so much as tried her wings in the larger world, or turned her eyes beyond the narrow limits of her home. She should have

every chance. He would not ask her to share his crust while there might be others eager to offer her the cakes and ale of life. For she ought to have the best. Putting aside every wish of his own, he always came back to that—this little girl was worthy of the very best.

“There is one thing, Di,” he said after a little, speaking carelessly; “you promised to let me know if anything bothered you. I fancy that you and Mrs. Henshaw don’t pull very well together.”

“I don’t like her,” she answered with perfect candour, “and she doesn’t like me; but that isn’t why——”

“If you don’t care about travelling with her,” he interrupted lightly, “you have only got to say so, and we can find some other escort. I may be going myself. And there are the Grants; some one told me they were going home soon.”

“Oh, but you mustn’t think I mind travelling with her,” she answered reassuringly; “it isn’t so bad as that. And it isn’t the things she says so much as herself I dislike. But I am not at all afraid of her now; and there is Philippa——”

“Were you ever afraid of her?” he asked. The lady in question hardly seemed to him

likely to inspire fear—rather, perhaps, a gentle contempt.

“I will tell you : I was dreadfully afraid she would marry the padre.”

“Marry your father!” he said with some surprise, forgetting that this had at one time been his own solution of the mysterious relations that seemed to exist between them. “Why, you foolish child, have you been making yourself miserable about that?” He could hardly restrain a smile. Mr. Ouvry subject to the grand passion! The notion had its ludicrous side.

“Not now. But once I thought of it, and it made me dreadfully angry. I could not have forgiven her if she had taken the padre from me.”

“Not even to have had Philippa for a sister?”

She shook her head.

He could not know how difficult loyalty to Philippa had proved, what pangs steadfast love had cost her; but the remembrance brought a little shadow over her bright face.

“She would not have been my sister always. She will go away and have a home of her own, and be very happy.”

“And you—— Don’t you propose to have a home of your own some day, too? If you

insist on making a Miss Piper of yourself, I'll have a word to say to you in my capacity of guardian."

His tone was careless, but if she had looked at him then she might have read his secret in his face. We can deceive with the words of the lips, but truth springs uncontrolled from the eyes.

But she was not thinking of him at that moment. They had left the river and the whispering reeds; they had climbed the ridge which is crowned by the little palace. She had turned her head and was looking back—a last long glance at the tangled wilderness of the garden, the wide plain, and, far to the west, the faint blue ranges of Avila and Bejar. It was but a moment to take farewell of these and of other visions; then she looked at him with gentle seriousness.

"I have the padre and you," she said.

END OF VOL. II.





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